

Published
Semi-Monthly.

BEADLE'S

(No. 380.
Vol. XXI.

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THE RED RIDER;

OR, THE

WHITE QUEEN OF THE APACHES.

A STORY OF WILD ADVENTURE.

BY JAMES L. BOWEN,

AUTHOR OF No. 351, "BLUE BELT GUIDE"

NEW YORK:

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,

83 WILLIAM STREET.

THE RED RIDER;

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Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1882, by
BEADLE AND COMPANY,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

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Attorney at Law, No. 301, "Herald Building,"

NEW YORK

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,

6 WILLIAM STREET.

THE RED RIDER.

CHAPTER I.

THE SILVER MINES.

A GROUP of men stood between two large cabins, conversing earnestly, yet with calmness. A majority of the party were of rough aspect, men who evidently had faced the perils of the border for a long time. The exceptions to this general carelessness of manner and attire were an Indian, wearing garments of a partially civilized cut, and a young man, who, judging from his dress, might have been the son of a prosperous farmer. These two stood near each other.

All were intently watching a horseman, who was riding toward them at a leisurely pace—a white man, rough in garb and armed to the teeth. The horse he rode was a powerful animal, and seemed to have been making great exertions, since he was reeking with sweat, and thickly flecked with foam.

"What ye expect is the row with Dun Humphries?" asked a tall, lank individual.

"Been chased by Aps," returned some one.

"Must be," said the first speaker. "Dun never'd run'd any horse like that, speshally Charley."

"That's a fact. Just see how the poor critter puffs and trembles. He's had a hard one of it."

"Yeou bet!"

Eagerly pressing forward, the group gathered about Dun when he rode up and tumbled from the saddle. A dozen questions at once were rained upon him, but before replying to any of them the rider motioned toward his faithful horse, saying:

"Tend to Charley, boys; I can't."

At the same time he pointed to his left arm, which, almost helpless, hung by his side. A bullet had plowed through it

near the shoulder, and not only the member itself, but the entire left side of the man was covered with clotted blood. Murmurs of surprise and indignation rose from all present, and more than one hand was carried to the stock of a revolver.

"Who did that?" was demanded from all sides.

"Oh, the cussed Aps, of course!" the wounded man groaned.

"Whar be they?" and seven pair of indignant eyes swept the horizon.

"Fell off about a mile back from here," Dun answered. "If Charley hadn't done wonders I'd been a goner! Poor boss! I hated to put him to it so, but thar was no help for it."

"How fur did they run ye?"

"Twenty-five mile, if they did a rod! I fell right in with 'em afore I knowed any thing about it, and shouldn't hev got here if Charley hadn't knowed more nor me. 'Twas that cussed woman's band what done it, too!"

"How do you know? Did you see her?" asked half a dozen eager voices.

"Yes, she was within five rods of me first dash, and I seen her plain as I see you now."

"How does she look? What is she, anyhow?" was asked, while every breath was held to catch the answer more perfectly.

"She's a white woman, that's sartin. Young—she can't be more nor twenty—handsome as a pictur', and every rag of her duds a bright red. Jest what we've heern, and I kin sw'ar to it all!"

"I'll own up, Dun, if you've seen it," remarked the young man of whom previous mention has been made. "But, I never believed any thing of the kind before. It never seemed to me that a woman could perpetrate such things as we hear of this fiend in red. After all it may not be more than half true. To see this monster in petticoats I believe I would be willing to run the same risk Humphries has just come out of."

The wounded man had walked into the cabin, where some of the more skilled of his companions were busy dressing his

arm, while the remainder scattered to report the news among their fellow-miners, or gossip in regard to the strange woman who had united her fortunes with a band of red cutthroats, and was reputed to be learning them the ways of vice and horror.

Arthur Ashton, the young man we have spoken of, was about leaving the place, when he felt a light touch upon the arm, and on turning found himself face to face with the Indian. The latter made a significant gesture, and the two walked away together.

"Well, Pimo, what do you want?" Ashton asked, after they had walked a short distance.

"You want!" returned the Indian. "Say you want to see her?"

"The woman? so I do!" the young man exclaimed, with fresh enthusiasm. "I would give any thing to see her."

"Me show you, to-night!"

"What's that, Pimo? you show me?"

The savage bowed his head.

"But you are a Pimo; a decent, peaceful sort of Indian. What have you to do with this woman? What do you know about her?"

"Me can show you, if you want to see her."

Finding that he was not thus likely to learn more from the dusky Pimo, Arthur put his questions in a different manner.

"How can you show her to me, Pimo?"

"Go with me to-night, and me let you see her."

"Go with you where; how far?"

The Pimo, not being particularly versed in English, hesitated for a term by which to make himself understood. Then pointing back toward the hut where they had left Dan Humphries, he asked:

"How far he run?"

"Twenty-five miles, he says," the young man replied.

By signs the Indian indicated upon his arm that the distance they would have to traverse would be nearly half as great, probably ten miles.

"How will we go?" Arthur asked.

"You take horse after dark, and ride there; me walk."

"Will not that be hazardous?"

The Indian shook his head and smiled.

"No man afraid when he go to see a pretty squaw!" he said, in such a manner that the hot blood rushed to Arthur's temples.

For some minutes he did not respond. Anxious as he was to meet this famed WOMAN FIEND, he knew that the plan proposed by the Pimo would be attended with much risk.

Some two months before the date of which we write, news reached Texas that silver mines, apparently of great richness, had been discovered in the south-western part of New Mexico, (as the boundary lines are now established.) A company was formed for the purpose of prospecting the place. Soon forty men, reckless fellows, were enlisted in the expedition. Indeed, any other class of persons would have hesitated to embark in an enterprise so hazardous. The reputed mine lay in a portion of the country regularly traversed by roaming bands of Apaches—the most dreadful of foes.

Among the party, on the morning when they set forth, appeared a young man of genteel manner and polished address, in striking contrast with the men by whom he was surrounded. At first he was regarded with much suspicion by the older members of the company, but an event soon occurred which placed him "above par" in the minds of his associates. Before the party had been a week upon the trail they encountered a band of Comanches, superior in numbers to themselves, and a conflict at once ensued. Arthur distinguished himself upon this occasion. Foremost in the fray, his wild impetuosity and unmistakable daring won the admiration of all who witnessed them. The Indians were speedily defeated, and he escaped unharmed.

Through danger and trial they reached the mines, finding all as represented, and had been located there nearly a month at the time of which we write.

Soon after the advent of the white men a solitary Pimo wandered among them, and, although he was not very graciously received, took up a permanent abode there. As he was a harmless, inoffensive savage, and belonged to a tribe which never had broken faith with the whites, he was allowed

to remain, and soon came to be regarded as one of the party, though still refusing to tell whence he came, or why.

Soon after the camp was established, news reached the miners that a band of Apaches had made its appearance in the neighborhood, more than ordinarily daring and skillful, led by a white woman. This latter person was reported young, beautiful, and a fiend in disposition. Always clothed in bright red, and mounted upon a powerful, spirited horse, she would lead her savage followers anywhere, into danger or out, with the most consummate skill and daring.

At first these reports were disbelieved by many of the miners, and Arthur Ashton had steadily refused to become convinced, up to the time when Dan Humphries came into camp wounded, and testified so positively as to leave no room for doubt. Now his anxiety to see this strange woman was equal to his former skepticism.

"If I go, it will be a foolhardy undertaking," he mused. "Still, there will be just as much purpose in it as in most of my life; and as for the danger—that is all that lends any zest to life. I wanted to see her, I said, and now I have an opportunity. Blame me if I'll go back on my own words, let what may come!"

Then aloud he added:

"Yes, Pimo, I'll go with you, come what may!"

"Good!"

The compact was made, and the two separated.

CHAPTER II.

THE RED RIDER OF THE APACHES.

ASHTON kept his own counsel, knowing very well that the Pimo would breathe nothing in regard to their intended expedition. Despite his natural recklessness, and the unconcern he tried to feel, the thought would very often intrude that he was going to run a very great risk, for only an indifferent object. Yet now that his word was given there could be no

retraction, for he would sooner have died than retract any decision, no matter how hasty.

He cared especially that his arms were in order. Both of his revolvers were discharged, and reloaded with particular attention. His rifle was freshly primed, and knife well sharpened. All the implements of death were then replaced very carefully, while he muttered:

"There, I'll warrant myself fully a match for fifteen or twenty Aps, if they give me any thing like a fair show. As for this Pimo, I'll send him to kingdom come if he shows a sign of treachery!"

Scarcely had the shades of darkness begun to descend when the Pimo presented himself.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Any time when you are," was the careless response.

"Get you hoss."

"Meet me just below the gulch!"

The red-skin withdrew without a word, and the young man moved away to the inclosure which contained his horse, with a number of others. At a low signal his own animal came toward him with a glad snort of recognition. Taking it by the mane, and uttering a few words of endearment, he turned away, the horse following him.

Arthur Ashton never used so much care in placing a saddle as upon that occasion. Not only was it nicely adjusted, but every strap and girth was examined to make certain that each was in perfect order.

Just as he was about springing to his seat one of the miners approached.

"Hilloa, Ashton," he exclaimed, "you off?"

"Shall be in a moment," he said.

"Well, look out the woman in red doesn't get too near you!"

"Just what I'm going after," was the reply, as Arthur turned his horse, and rode from the spot.

He did not find the Pimo where he expected, and rode on a short distance, looking upon every hand for him. Just as he fancied that the red-man had played him false, there was a movement in the grass almost between his horse's feet, and the figure bounded up, in a manner so utterly unexpected

that Arthur momentarily drew the rein, and placed his hand upon an ever-ready pistol.

"No shoot!" said the Pimo, with a faint smile. "Suppose me been Apache, me have your sculp!"

"Either that or have lost yours," was the cool response. "Where is your horse?"

"Don't want any. Me walk fast as you ride in dark."

"But suppose we have to run for it?"

"Ough, me take care of Pimo; never feel afraid for me."

"Your risk isn't mine, I'm sure," responded Arthur. "But, let me tell you that if you get me into any danger, purposely I shall blow your brains out the first thing!"

"Good!"

The savage made no other response, but took a position beside the rider, and the twain went at an easy pace, on through the increasing darkness, over the undulating prairie. The Pimo kept beside the rider, mile after mile, without apparent effort.

The very face of the country, and the lonely, exposed situation, would have seemed a sufficient test for the courage of any man, ignoring the presence of the wandering red-men, with hearts more savage than the wildest beast. Upon the right hand rose the mountain range, not very high, but stern and dark. Its brow and sides were covered with a straggling, bristling forest, while the plain below was almost utterly destitute of trees, only here and there a group appearing to break the monotony of the scene. To the left rose another range, approaching in places within a short distance of those upon the right, then receding till a plain several miles in breadth spread between them. Before, as behind, the comparatively level expanse might extend miles, or terminate in a few furlongs. No human eye could penetrate the mountain windings and darkness to discover.

The harsh grass rustled as the parties passed through it, and a timid man might have fancied that a score of enemies were gathering to spring upon him.

Arthur Ashton was not the man to care for mere surroundings, or mere sounds. There was something in the wild gloom of the scenery in perfect accord with his nature. There was

no moon, and but a very feeble starlight, so that a stranger could tell but very indifferently where to shape his course. Accordingly the young man dropped the reins upon his horse's neck, and allowed the animal to move under the guidance of the Pimo, who occasionally touched the bridle to turn the animal's course this way or that.

In this manner they had proceeded some ten miles or more, when the Pimo suddenly turned the horse to the right, conducting him into a deep gulch in the mountain side. It was intensely dark there, and for a few moments Arthur could distinguish nothing. The Pimo was not idle an instant, however. He at once proceeded to secure the horse to one of the strongest shrubs he could find, and by the time this was done Arthur was upon his feet beside him.

"Leavee here," the Pimo said, in low tones. "Step like panther—come."

With weapons ready for instant use in case of need, young Ashton followed his nearly invisible guide.

The latter wound over and around the mountain side, scaling some elevations and avoiding others, winding into gullies and climbing out of them, at times entangled in the midst of rocky ravines, and soon finding some narrow way of exit, until Arthur felt sure they must have traveled two miles in this manner. As to the place where the horse had been left he had no real idea.

Finally the Pimo stopped, and by the pressure of his hand indicated that Arthur was to remain where he was for a moment. Not without some misgivings the young man took a revolver in his hand, and remained standing there alone in the darkness and solitude.

He had not long to wait, for the Indian soon returned, and whispered:

"Come now; very soft!"

The savage led the way, the young man following. Their course lay up an almost perpendicular ascent, which required the aid of bushes for foot and hand. Grasping and bracing against these, they ascended nearly a hundred feet in this way, before reaching the crest.

The Indian peered over for a moment, and then settled back beside the white man.

"Go up there," he whispered, so low that Arthur could scarcely understand his words; "look over very careful, and see her!"

Cautiously raising himself, Ashton gazed over the crest of the ridge.

He was somewhat startled at beholding a body of Apaches not more than thirty yards away! Evidently they had but just reached the place, as some of the party were engaged in kindling a fire, while others were employed in constructing a small lodge. The latter at once engrossed the attention of the young man. Of course it was for *her*. Where was she?

He had scarcely taken in the scene, and asked himself the question, when he beheld her approaching the very place of his concealment. At the distance of twenty paces she stopped, and gazed about her for some moments.

The newly-kindled fire gave the only light which the place received, save such as came from the feeble stars, and the face of the strange woman was turned from it. Anxious as he was, Arthur could only see the form in outline, while the features remained a sealed book to him.

What he saw, however, was sufficient to inflame his ardent soul to the fullest.

Beyond question, report had spoken truly in saying that she was young, graceful, elegant in form, and queenlike in bearing.

She moved among the painted warriors with the air of one aware of her superiority, while the deference of the braves was too marked to escape observation.

For a long while the youth gazed before allowing his eyes to leave the object of his thoughts. He was deeply anxious to see her face, and hoped she would turn in some manner so that he might be gratified.

Finally the little lodge was completed, a brave stepped up to the woman and announced the fact. With an impatient posture she turned, walked toward it, and entered without making any pause.

Now that the great object of attraction was gone from his sight, Arthur found a few moments in which to notice the position and character of the Apaches.

As nearly as he could judge the party consisted of about thirty warriors, and a strong, hardy-looking body they were. Evidently the white queen had a picked band. Their horses were tied close to the encampment, on the side opposite to Arthur, and a single guard stationed among them, evidently to see that they did not break loose, since the Apaches seemed to feel perfectly secure in their haunt.

As one after the other of the party produced food and squatted about the fire to enjoy it, Ashton began to grow impatient. He had seen the object of his curiosity, to be sure, but that fact was not quite satisfactory, of itself. He wished to see her more closely, to scan her features, and speak to her, if any opportunity should present.

"I wonder if she'll be out again," he mused. "I'll ask Pimo."

He turned to whisper the question to his companion, and was more than surprised to find himself alone!

For a moment this unexpected discovery quite confounded the young man. What to do he knew not. He stooped down, and retraced his steps for a short distance, and very carefully whispered the name of

"Pimo!"

No Pimo answered, and as it would have been fatal to make any alarm, Arthur concluded to creep back to the crest, and endeavor to catch another glimpse of the strange creature he had come so far to see. Here, too, if the Pimo had meditated any treachery, and such thoughts would arise, he would first learn that fact by observation of the Apaches.

Upon regaining his position the young man saw that something unusual had occurred among the Apaches. They were aroused, and several had taken their weapons, and were leaving camp upon the side opposite to that on which Ashton was crouching.

In a moment he thought of the Pimo, and feared that he had in some manner drawn the notice of the Indians, and was in danger of suffering for his indiscretion. Had he been quite sure this was the case, notwithstanding the danger which would necessarily result to himself, Ashton would have hastened to the assistance of his imperiled guide. But it might be some cause quite remote which had created the commotion

among the Apaches. Keeping himself ready, therefore, he waited for the development.

A dozen warriors had left the circle about the fire, and as many more were standing with arms in hand, ready for instant service if required. The balance of the party were lying around quite unconcerned, or pursuing their ordinary occupations.

Several minutes passed in suspense, and then a shout of triumph rose from the distance, taken up and repeated by those nearer, till a chorus of yells, as of Bedlam broken loose, reverberated through the rough mountain passes and peaks, till the young man in his crouching position really began to wonder if another large body of savages was not close at hand.

He was presently undeceived in this respect, as the yelling rabble came in, bringing with them a captive, whom he recognized at once as his Pimo friend and late guide. This was a decidedly unpleasant state of affairs, for if the savage did not purchase his own safety, if possible, by revealing the position of the young man, the case presented many a phase of unpleasant aspect. Not the least undesirable of these was the fact that Arthur had traveled so far, and by such intricate routes since leaving his horse, that it was a matter of doubt whether he could find the animal unassisted, at least without several hours' search.

However, while these reflections were running through his mind he was earnestly watching the proceedings of the Apaches.

CHAPTER III.

CHANGING PLACES.

On first bringing their prisoner into camp the Apaches began to ply him with questions, gathering in a circle about him, and using all manner of fierce gestures and speeches to intimidate or frighten him. But the Pimo seemed to retain

his presence of mind despite all their threatenings, and this was finally relinquished.

A messenger was then sent to the tent of the strange woman, and after a respectful salutation at the door he entered. Arthur looked for his reappearance, hoping the woman would come forth, too. But she did not appear, and presently the messenger returned to his fellows, bearing the commands of the tented queen.

Immediately upon the delivery of the message he bore, whatever it might be, the Apaches seized their captive, and passing a stout rope about the body, just beneath his arms, knotted it securely to a young tree growing in the edge of the fire-lit circle. The Pimo's limbs were left entirely free, but as the knot which secured the rope was completely beyond his reach, he was as effectually confined as though bound hand and foot.

During these preparations, Arthur on one or two occasions saw the Pimo's eyes glance inquiringly in his direction, but he dared make no signal through fear of discovery, as the Apaches seemed unusually alert for intimations of the presence of others. He was earnestly resolved, however, not to see the poor fellow seriously tortured without interfering in his behalf in some rash manner. The probable consequence to himself he scarcely considered. Indeed, cautiousness and casualty were not well-developed traits of Arthur Ashton's character.

No sooner had the Pimo been well secured to the tree in question than his would-be executioners hastened to collect all the dry branches and limbs in the vicinity, which they arranged in a semicircle before the prisoner, at a distance of about two feet from his person. The object was apparent. They intended to roast him alive!

Arthur was fairly boiling over with rage. He grasped his revolvers, and was upon the point of rushing in pell-mell, but finally concluded to wait for a more favorable moment. However, his spirits did not calm at all, as the cool fiendishness of the Apaches was developed.

The pile of fagots and limbs was completed, and then the tormentors paused for a while to aggravate the tortures of their victim, and seek to learn from him something of his

purpose or companions, as the hidden observer had no difficulty in determining, though, not understanding the Apache tongue, he was unable to gather the particular drift of their inquiries.

The Pimo remained firm, however, and all the threatenings and demonstrations only fell upon listless ears. He replied occasionally, but his replies only seemed to madden the Apaches the more. At length one of them, in an excess of passion, raised the nearest brand upon the fire, and dashed it into the midst of the pile about the captive.

In a few moments a bright curl of flame burst up, which spread rapidly, and presently a heavy column of smoke swept off into the forest, almost hiding the man at the stake from sight. Arthur knew that for some minutes that person would only suffer in mind, and after a brief consultation with himself he moved very carefully from his hiding-place, and began to creep around the camp.

This was not a trifling matter, for from one side only was the camp easy of access. Upon the others the land was broken and rocky, cut by sharp gullies and deep ravines. Owing to the obstacles of this nature that he met, the young man made slower progress than he had expected; so much so, indeed, that he began to get quite impatient of the delay. Still it was necessary that he observe due caution, else the plan he had partially formed in his mind would prove of no practicability.

At length he succeeded in reaching the belt of smoke, which rolled away through the forest for some distance close to the ground, and although it was not a comfortable position, it was tolerably safe for the present.

Here he was enabled to see that the fire about his Pimo friend was making considerable progress and must already be quite uncomfortable. Grasping his knife in one hand, and a revolver in the other, he paused for a moment to regain perfect control of his nerves. His rifle was slung upon his back, being less serviceable at close quarters than the repeating pistols, of which he had another in his belt, ready for service after the knife had done its work.

Carefully creeping up behind the tree which held the Pimo, and refraining from coughing with difficulty, as the smoke

would penetrate to his lungs despite all his efforts to the contrary, he bent low, and drew the keen knife smartly across the rope which confined the captive.

The latter felt the thong loosen, and with one quick bound he sprung over the fire and back into the forest beyond. No sooner did the Indians realize the partial escape of their prey, than they raised a shout and bounded after him.

Arthur, rather surprised at the rapidity of the results, found himself surrounded by the savages before he could arrange in his own mind the manner of his retreat, that being something of which he had not thought up to the moment when it became necessary to act.

At first, having been passed by the Pimo at a bound, and the latter being closely followed by the foremost of the pursuers, Arthur was not discovered, though the suspense of his position, and the impossibility of getting away, made that fact in itself of but little moment. But he was not long to remain in a position of quiet. An Apache, peering in every obscure corner for any trace of the escaped victim, found himself face to face with the young white man. Giving a cry of alarm he drew back to prepare his weapons, but was too late. A ball from Ashton's pistol went through his breast, and as he turned to fly the young man was conscious that his foe had fallen.

Away through the forest Arthur went, with no definite purpose save to get out of the immediate vicinity of the Apaches. That was not to be, however. In freeing the Pimo he had barely exchanged places with him, and now found that the entire force of the camp was called into service for his own capture. For dark, flitting figures were in the forest all around him, and by their signals he began to comprehend that it was their purpose to surround him, and thus effect his capture with less danger to themselves.

"So they've learned to fear these little guns I carry," he mused. "Very well, I'll learn them to fear them still more. Possibly I'll teach them respect, as well as fear."

He turned quickly to the right, but before taking five paces found himself in collision with an Indian brave. There was flash and report, and the fugitive sped onward again, for his way was clear. But the pistol-report, indicating plainly to

every member of the pursuing party the exact position of their victim, gathered the savages so closely about the young man that in a few moments he was completely hemmed in.

Under these circumstances he very naturally thought of surrender, but with the idea came the memory of the torture from which he had delivered his Pimo friend, and which he would no doubt be required to suffer, with all the aggravations possible to savage invention.

"Not while I can help it!" he exclaimed, between his set teeth, and in a breath he was firing right and left with his **revolvers**.

Several of the Apaches went down, killed or wounded, and a wholesale awe swept over the survivors. But one to thirty was too great odds for the most daring, no matter how well armed, and in a short time the white man was knocked down, his weapons taken away, and his arms bound.

Arthur had not been injured very severely by the blow which prostrated him, and he struggled with all his strength in the vain effort to resist the savages. After quite exhausting himself in this manner, which he was allowed to do, he was hurried back to the camp, and a messenger sent to bear the news of his capture to the mysterious white queen.

The red-skin returned presently, and muttered something to the assembled warriors which was hailed with evident satisfaction. Dark snarls and frowning glances met him at every turn, and a score of weapons gleamed in the pale firelight. He did not forget his unfortunate friend the Pimo, however, and by glancing around upon the assembled warriors he felt quite satisfied that the pursuit of him had been given up.

This fact cheered the young man, somewhat, since it gave him the assurance that he had not undertaken the task entirely in vain. He had changed places with the Pimo, and slain three or four of the Apaches, at least. So the red-skins had gained nothing in victims, but had lost several of their own number.

Arthur, however, had little time for self-congratulation, for he was convinced that the Indians intended, so far as possible to repay him for the trouble he had given them.

Bound as his arms were, he was placed upon his back on the ground, and presently a forked stick was driven into the earth

with the prongs upon either side of his neck, so that he was held down as by a vise. This was driven down so close as scarcely to allow him room for breathing, and then others were in like manner placed upon each ankle, near the foot. As thus confined, he could move his body slightly, but neither head nor feet. So far as escape was concerned he was as effectually fastened as though the entire weight of the Rocky Mountain chain had borne him to the earth.

Now that he was thus secured the Indians seemed in no hurry to proceed with their purpose, whatever it might be, but took time to bring in their dead, which were carefully bestowed upon one side of the camp, not far from the lodge of the queen. A sort of rude dance and song was then indulged in, the object of which seemed to be twofold: to repeat the bravery and valor of the fallen, and incite their comrades to a more furious state of feeling toward the slayer.

During the excitement of the dance the mysterious woman who had unwittingly been the occasion of the night's adventures appeared. She approached near enough to gaze upon the faces of the fallen braves, and then turned away. Beside a tree, standing somewhat apart from the scene of blood, she paused, and leaning against the trunk seemed lost in reverie.

Arthur watched her intently, and although he felt that a dreadful death was very soon to be his portion, he could not remove his eyes or thoughts from the strange being who had been the cause of his fate. How one like her—beautiful in form, and graceful in every motion—could be the merciless fiend that she was represented, and which he now believed her to be, was more than the young man could determine. Once he even half resolved to call to her, hoping to hear the sound of her voice, at least, but a second thought prevented him, and with a sigh he closed his eyes.

When he opened them, scarcely a moment later, she was gone, and half in doubt as to the reality of what he had seen Arthur began to kick and struggle to assure himself that he was really awake all the while. It needed but little effort to convince him that the fact of his being staked to the ground was real, and more than that.

His tormentors were now at work again, and a brief

observation showed them to be acting with a purpose. They were procuring tough branches from trees in the vicinity, which were bent into semicircles, and the two ends plunged into the earth upon either side of the prisoner, leaving the nearest point some two feet from his body. These were placed about six inches apart, from the stakes at his feet nearly up to his chin.

Of course it required no prophet to determine upon the purpose in view, even if the savages had not proceeded to pile a quantity of brush upon the framework thus formed. The young man shuddered, despite his recklessness and firmness, as he viewed these preparations going on above him. His heart seemed swelling into a great lump, and filling his throat, while a momentary sense of faintness came over him. But no word or murmur escaped him, and the preparations went on nearly in silence.

Finally the work was completed, the men stepped back, forming a circle, and at a signal from the acting chief of the party, one of the number grasped a brand from the fire, and thrust it into the hollow pile.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE BONDS.

FOR a few moments Arthur Ashton struggled desperately to free himself from the terrible situation in which he had been placed. He pressed his neck against the cruel wood until it seemed he must die if he persisted, and then he relaxed his efforts only to pull and struggle with his feet.

When he finally ceased, unable to free himself at all, it was getting uncomfortably warm beneath the burning arch. But there was no help for it, and the sufferer endeavored to nerve himself to meet the crisis.

This was not so easy a task. To brave death in the exciting scenes of conflict, or even in wild adventure, when the blood went tingling through the frame with the fire of excited

ardor, was easy enough, and Arthur Ashton never shrunk from such scenes. But, to remain in such a horribly painful position and witness the slow approach of a dreadful fate, required a far different degree of moral courage, or an intense amount of physical indifference. Neither of these were characteristic of Arthur. He had too much self-control to allow the expression of any vain outcries or unmanly exhibition of weakness, but it was, at the same time, impossible for him to bring himself into a frame of mental resignation.

He could not help reflecting upon the foolishness of the wild fancy which had brought him to the place.

"A woman's face," he muttered to himself. "A handsome figure! And to get a glimpse of these I have given my life! Well, it might have gone in some other way, equally foolish. Perhaps I ought to be content, but this is awful. How the heat seems to penetrate my flesh and char the bones! I wonder if I could move my legs without their breaking off! But I never shall have the opportunity to move them, so it does not matter. After all, this is not a drop in the bucket. What it must be before death comes to my relief I can not imagine. Oh, fiend! I did not believe you existed, but now I have the most convincing proof. Yes, red riding fiend, you are all you have been painted, and infinitely more! The proof is burning into my bones. I am convinced at last."

Really Arthur had commenced to suffer. This pain, too, was aggravated by his nervous, excited state, so that his fancies actually led his sensations.

The savages were gathered about him, watching for any outward sign of pain or any word of entreaty that they might exult therein, but as yet nothing of the kind rewarded them. If he must die, terrible as was the thought, the young man resolved to afford the savages as little gratification as possible.

While they were still watching for the first expression which should give an opportunity to exult, the circle was broken by a scarlet-robed figure which advanced near to the prostrate sufferer. It was the woman fiend!

She gazed upon him for a few moments, during which their eyes met, and then, as though satisfied with the infernal work she turned away. Yielding to the impulse of the moment the young man called after her:

"Woman, speak to me!" he said, in Spanish.

"What shall I say to you?" she asked, turning again toward him. "Or would you like to talk yourself, and have me for a listener, miserable Mexican?"

"Would I had been a Mexican, or any thing else, so I had attended to my own business, and not come here upon a woman-hunt!" Arthur exclaimed, in English, quite undecided what further to say to the strange being before, or above him.

She, however, saved him the trouble of much thought, for upon hearing the exclamation she quickly asked, in English:

"What, then, are you, sir; an American?"

"I am," was the answer.

"What, then, brought you to this place? Americans do not frequent the camps of Apache warriors without an object."

"No, madam, I had an object. I had heard many strange things in regard to you, and felt a great anxiety to see you with my own eyes. I came, and caught a glimpse of you. I would have gone away, but my guide was captured, and your men undertook to torture him. I succeeded in freeing him, but fell into their hands myself. That is all."

"You find it uncomfortably warm where you are now, I feel quite bold to say."

"Indeed, nothing would be more agreeable than a reduction of the temperature," returned Arthur, smarting with the heat which he had scarcely noticed during the brief conversation with the strange woman.

The latter proceeded:

"Will you talk candidly with me for a few moments if I set you up? Mind, I make no promises as to the future."

"I'll be very glad to do it," exclaimed Arthur, writhing as a burning twig fell upon his smoking clothing and instantly burned through to the flesh.

"And mind, you shall make no attempt to escape," pursued the cool-headed woman.

"I promise it."

The being in red turned to the attendant Indians, and uttered some sentences in their guttural language, though the young man of course had no idea as to their import. At first

the red-skin, demurred, but a fire of indignation shot from the queen's eyes, and with a mien which left no ground for equivocation she repeated her orders.

This time they were promptly obeyed. The stakes which had pinned the young man to the earth were removed, and he was dragged forth from the fiery oven. Two savages then took him in charge, raised him to his feet, and conducted him toward the lodge of the queen, that personage preceding them.

Arthur walked at first with a little difficulty, and his limbs felt sore and stiff. Still he began to be sure that they were not yet badly blistered, and he had no doubt that if he could only escape further experience of the horrible torture he should very soon be as good as new.

He followed his guide into the rude lodge, and in obedience to a signal seated himself upon the ground. A pine knot which served for a torch was thrust into the earth near him, and by its rays he was enabled to make a survey of the narrow limits. There was little of interest in the place, however, save the strange being for whose use the structure was erected.

Having now a good opportunity to examine her, the young man swept his eyes quickly over her, taking in all the points upon which he had so often thought and wondered since first learning of her strange, fearful career.

In size she was scarcely more than medium, firmly built, with an easy, almost commanding bearing. Her movements were dignified if not studied, and there was something in her presence to repel familiarity and inspire respect—even to obedience. Her features, which were quite round and full, were rather pleasing as a whole, though the expression was too cold and firm for loveliness. Nor was this expression softened by the keen, black eyes, which seemed to pierce and read the soul of the beholder. Her hair, which was black as night, was closely coiled at the back of her head, showing a care and neatness scarcely to be expected in such a place. Her form was full and plump, but would have served rather as a model of well-developed muscular womanhood than as an ideal of perfect feminine beauty.

Her dress was a mixture of Mexican and Indian in style,

sitting her form, and showing it off to good advantage. Neither cumbersome, nor yet too light, it was in perfect keeping with the being clothed. In color, as already remarked, every article was, or had been, of a brilliant scarlet.

The fitting up of the lodge was simple enough. Upon one side was a couch, made of boughs picked from the nearest evergreen trees, and upon which the queen, if thus she might be called, was now seated. In one corner, near at hand, stood the panniers from which she had evidently just been making her meal, and which constituted the only baggage in the structure.

These facts Arthur had noticed very much more quickly than they can be read; indeed, but a few moments passed from his introduction to the place ere he was diverted from the survey he had been making to other topics.

Seeing the young man seated upon the ground, the woman dropped upon the couch, and addressed the attendant Indians in their own language, though they seemed to understand Spanish when that language was spoken. The Apaches retired promptly at the word, and Arthur was left alone with the very woman he had desired most of all on earth to meet in this manner.

At first he could scarcely credit his senses. That the very thing which of all others he had most hoped for, and risked so much to obtain, almost having sacrificed his life in its pursuit, should be at last attained seemed too strange for credit. Momentarily the dread fate hanging over his head was forgotten. He only lived in the presence of that woman whose bloody deeds were sending thrills of horror to every heart, and which had already won her the name of the woman fiend!

"You look like a sensible young man," she began, fixing her eyes closely upon his features.

"Looks may deceive," Arthur returned, with a sort of smile.

"Which convinces me still more that you are a sensible being," was the rejoinder.

"What a calm, matter-of-fact way she has," pursued Ashton, musing to himself. "Nothing appears there so very extraordinary or dreadful."

As he did not answer audibly his companion pursued:

"And since you are evidently a man of some sense I wonder the more what brought you to this lone place, if what you told me but now be true."

"It is true, madam, I swear it. I came only from a curiosity to see the woman of whom I had heard such—marvellous things."

"Devilish things, you would have said. You need not be delicate as to the terms you use in addressing me."

"Whatever I may have to say, I shall not forget that I am speaking to a woman," pursued Arthur.

"Ah, indeed! And now that your curiosity is gratified, since you have both seen and conversed with me, what do you think is to be your fate?"

The young man remembered the dreadful oven from which he had just been drawn forth, and a shudder convulsed his frame.

"Of course I can not tell," he replied.

"You had heard something of me before you set out. What did that lead you to expect, in case you fell into the hands of my band?—for I make no prisoners myself."

Ashton pointed back toward the fiery scene he had left.

"But suppose I grant you a momentary, painless death?"

"I should prefer it very much. Of course I am but human, and shrink from suffering. But your braves shall never know it—no, nor you either, save as I now confess it!"

"I see you are a young man of good courage. Now hearken to me!"

She paused for a moment, not as though collecting her thoughts, for she always appeared calm and collected, but as though reading the inmost thoughts of the young man before her. At length, apparently satisfied, she spoke again.

"Who I am or what I am, does not matter to you, save as you see me here. And that is no business of yours, save as you sought me out, by playing the part of a spy! Stop, do not interrupt me, for I know what you would say. You have learned something, and in learning it have justly forfeited your life, besides destroying others. But you had a morbid curiosity behind all, and I have a similar feeling. Now it is in your power to regain your life and liberty by making a—"

two promises, and swearing upon your honor that you will sacredly observe them.

"Tell me their nature," said Arthur, not too quickly, "and if I can in honor comply with them I should be very foolish to refuse to do so."

"But suppose what I wish can not be done *honorably*?"

The young man paused, and bit his lips. With the memory of all the late horrors through which he had passed fresh in his mind, it is no wonder that he contemplated the purchase of life at any price. But after a short mental conflict, he replied emphatically, yet with a tinge of bitterness:

"I will not disgrace myself, even to save my miserable life for a few more days or years!"

"That is well," was the prompt response. "For if you had not reserved your honor to me, how could I in turn have trusted you? There is little true honor in this world, young man, but when I meet I respect it. Now I will tell you what I require. If you assent to the conditions your life shall be spared; if not, I have not the power to break with my Apache friends."

The young man trembled with the excitement of the moment. Could it be, with all the horrors about him, and the dread fate supposed to be hanging over him, that he could buy back the life which his recklessness had forfeited, and if so at what price? What were the terms which this unknown woman was about to impose upon him? Was his destiny henceforth in some measure to be linked with hers? His wildest fancy had never dreamed any thing so strange, yet it might be.

"Tell me the terms," he said, in a voice which was far from being steady.

"Listen, then. I spoke of two promises, but it was inadvertently. I shall require three. Two for the future, and one for the present. To one condition you will very readily assent, I presume. It is that the events of this night be kept a profound secret from all—even your choicest friends."

"I assent to that, lady, most fully. I should never of myself divulge any thing which might transpire, since I have no particular friends in this part of the world."

"Enough for that. Now for the next. You will hold

yourself ready at any time to perform any honorable service I may require of you, regardless of any inconvenience which may result to you, or any ordinary degree of danger. And any thing of that nature which may be performed shall also be kept a secret."

Arthur hesitated a moment, reflecting upon the nature and scope of this requirement. He saw that in effect this required his entire life-services should the singular creature he was to aid in this manner insist upon them. Still he could scarcely refuse with good grace, as his life would in one sense of the word be hers. The memory of the fiery furnace from which he had recently been drawn decided him.

"I accept that, also," he said:

"You swear it, upon your sacred honor, and your life?"

"I do."

"Enough, for I can assure you that a refusal will leave you with a very short lease of life, indeed. Now for the third and last. Promise that you will now tell me any thing of a general nature which I may wish to know, and in future furnish me with any information of the same character that I may ask for. Also that if you hereafter learn of any expedition being fitted out especially to destroy me—*especially me*, I say—you will inform me in good time, or as soon as you know it."

The young man repeated the different portions of the proposition.

"This requires nothing dishonorable, or villainous?" he added.

"Nothing of that kind."

"Then I promise for that, also."

"Swear it."

"I do, so help me God!"

"Enough—you will soon be at liberty to depart. Now to answer my questions."

Half an hour later the woman had satisfied her curiosity, and rising to her feet, remarked:

"Stay here till I return. I have in the camp something you will need."

After a short absence she returned, bearing Arthur's rifle, revolvers, and knife, which she placed before him, with all

the accoutrements of which he had been dispossessed. While he was adjusting and examining them, she remarked :

"I must give you a little advice. Be careful how you fall in with this band again, for they are very bitter upon you for the death of their comrades. Perhaps even myself may not be able to save you again. You have given me your name and place of abode. I am called Niña, and somewhere in the world I may always be found. Do not endeavor to seek me, however, for I shall search you out when I have work for you to do. Now remember your promises, and go, if you would have the advantage of the darkness. Beware of the Apaches !"

She preceded him to the entrance, but stopped suddenly as she looked forth. A semicircle of scowling Apaches surrounded the front of the lodge, and no sooner did the opening of the flap reveal Arthur, than a fierce hiss of savage ferocity ran along the circle.

"Wait a moment," Niña said, as she drew the young American back.

Taking the torch from its resting-place, and a nicely-fashioned revolver in her hand, she again advanced to the opening, saying to Arthur :

"Keep near me for a time ; all will be well."

CHAPTER V.

AN AMBUSHED FOR.

NATURALLY enough, Arthur Ashton felt a revulsion of spirits on observing the attitude of the savages. That they were incited by hostility to him there could be no doubt. Whether the resolute woman who stood between him and them would be a sufficient shield he could not determine. To be sure, he held a number of lives in his trusty weapons, but in the event of a concerted rush, he could only fire a few shots, perhaps enough to more fully inflame the red-skins.

All depended upon Niña. How anxiously, then, he awaited

her first words and their effect. He had not long to remain in doubt.

Stepping outside the lodge, and holding her torch so that it shone in the faces of all the assembled throng, she gazed at each in turn a moment, and then swept the circle with a keen glance.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, in Spanish.

For a moment none replied.

"What are you doing here?" she repeated. "Away, I tell you, and attend to your own affairs. If I need your presence about my lodge, I can summon you. Go!"

A few fell back a short distance, while others stood firm, eyeing the young American with an expression of vindictive hatred.

Niña moved forward another pace, till she could look directly into the eyes of the more rebellious, and then she spoke again.

"Braves of the Apaches," she said, "I have been with you some time, and have gone with you upon many an expedition, and into many a fight. We have proved ourselves warriors. I had hoped to lead you many times more. But if you refuse to do my bidding promptly now, I will never go with you again. And mark you, if but one of you offer to harm this American, who is my friend, he shall die like the dog he is!"

This decided declaration was not without its effect; the savages fell back, and soon the last one was moving from the place. Putting a finger to her lips, Niña uttered a peculiar whistle. In a moment the Apaches had retraced their steps and were gathering around her.

"See this man," she said, pointing to Arthur. "He is not a Mexican dog, to be cuffed or skinned, but a true American and my friend. If you ever meet him, see that he is not hurt for woe will come to the brave that does him harm!"

She waved her hand again, and the savages fell back without a murmur. Seeing that she had fully reduced them to subordination, she turned to Arthur, saying:

"Now go. The way is clear and the braves will not molest you. But beware how you fall into their hands again, for they never forget."

"I will heed what you say, lady; and thank you for what you have done for me," returned Arthur, as he bowed low and left her presence.

The young man's sensations upon again finding himself free were decidedly of a joyous nature. He stopped not for any very close analysis, however, but recollecting the deadly glances he had seen shot at him from the encircling warriors, proceeded to put as good a distance as practicable between himself and them.

He had no particular idea as to where his horse was to be found, but he knew nearly the direction of the mines, and toward them he bent his way, after taking an observation of the stars, to lay his course the more correctly. He had not suffered very severely from his fight, or his subsequent roasting—at least, he had not received injuries deep enough to prevent him from walking quite freely. Having found the route by which he had reached the Apache camp, he began to follow it back, reflecting, as he went, upon the remarkable scenes through which he had passed, and wondering as to the fate of his absent guide. He had not a doubt but the Pimo escaped, and very likely he might be far on his way to the mines, to repeat his adventure, and proclaim the supposed **fate of Ashton.**

In that case the young man saw that he would have some difficulty in keeping his first promise to the Apache queen. However, he resolved to prove true to her; and then he began to wonder where the novel compact they had made would end.

Arthur reached the vicinity where he supposed his horse to be, and was beginning to look out for any traces of the animal, when he suddenly became aware that some person was following him.

He looked quickly behind him, but saw nothing; waited and listened a short time, but heard nothing. Quite possibly it was but fancy. He turned to proceed, but had taken only a few steps, when he was conscious again of the moving presence. Again he turned and looked and listened, but with the same result, or want of result.

"Pshaw! I'm just dreaming all this," he muttered. "I've been into so many unusual boxes to-night, that I fancy

myself getting into a snare all the time. I will mind no more about it, and if any thing transpires, let it come! I never shall be readier for an adventure."

Scarcely had he reached this conclusion when he caught his toe in a low vine, and nearly fell to the earth. The stumble probably saved his life, for as he was bent partially forward in the act of securing his balance, an arrow passed through his frock upon the shoulder, grazing the flesh and falling to the ground beyond.

Arthur was sensible of the passing of the shaft, and knew that it was intended to kill him. From the manner of its discharge he felt sure that he was followed by a would-be assassin, and that the cowardly fellow was the one whom he had heard dogging his steps.

In obedience to the first thought which occurred, he dropped upon the ground, uttering a groan, and rolling as though in agony. A quick step sounded, and a stalwart savage bounded upon the scene. As he approached Arthur partially rose to his knees, and presented a revolver, which he had in hand ready cocked.

The savage attempted to avoid the discharge, and so he did, but not by any skill of his own. When Arthur pulled the trigger the cap exploded properly, but the worthless weapon held fire for an instant. This disconcerted the young man's aim, and he missed the Indian. Before he could raise the hammer again, or change his position materially, the Apache had grasped the arm which presented the pistol just above the wrist, and seized the weapon in the other hand.

A momentary fierce struggle ensued. The Indian had an unmistakable advantage, having both hands concentrated upon the weapon. Still Arthur had grasped one of his thumbs, and was wrenching it violently, in the hope of breaking the red-skin's hold before his own strength was quite exhausted.

Something presented, however, to change the nature of the struggle. Arthur espied the hilt of the Apache's knife peeping forth quite handy to grasp, and next moment he had his hand upon it. The Indian, seeing the danger which was likely to result from this new combination, sprung quickly back and to one side, breaking Arthur's hold, and throwing the young man off his guard. This was followed by powerful

springs and plunges on the part of the red-skin, having for their object either to throw Arthur to the earth, or break his hold upon the pistol.

Neither of these results was easily accomplished, however. The young man was used to severe bodily exercise, and but for the trying ordeal through which he had that night passed would have been more than a match for the Apache, although the latter was much the heaviest in body. As it was, however, every exertion caused him a thrill of pain, and he began to fear that his antagonist would finally prove the better man.

Suddenly bethinking himself that the conflict was not necessarily confined to hands, he sprung backward, and gave the Indian's right arm a kick into which he concentrated all the muscle of which he was master. It was fortunate that he did so, for at the very moment the revolver was drawn from his grasp, and the furious foot application had the effect to send it flying through the air, so that neither party was in possession of it.

The warrior, seeing the turn affairs had taken, sprung behind a tree to repair his well-spent vital force, and Arthur followed his example. The latter would now have no difficulty in slipping away, and felt quite sure he could escape the red-skin in the darkened forest. Still he felt that he had now the advantage, inasmuch as he was upon his guard, and certainly possessed better weapons than his adversary. Consequently he did not wish to retreat and leave a revolver upon the field for his would-be assassin to bear away.

Drawing and cocking his remaining pistol, and feeling that the cap was in place upon the nipple, Arthur bent low, and listened for the slightest sound which should indicate the presence of the savage, or his approach.

In a few minutes he fancied he heard a sound, very slight, indeed, lighter than the zephyr's whisper, but quite audible, notwithstanding. Whence it came was not so easy to determine. He listened intently, with the full knowledge that a wily foe was stealing upon him, but although he occasionally heard a slight rustle, it was so very slight that he could not tell whence it emanated.

Suddenly he caught sight of a dark figure crouching almost

in reach of him, moving around from behind the very tree which sheltered him. Before he could bring a pistol to bear there was a spring, a shock, and the two men had grappled again, this time in a death-struggle.

The Apache had his knife in hand, and on the instant of closing the young man felt the sharp point in his shoulder. But he only pressed the savage closer to him, while he passed the hand containing the pistol around him, and aiming upward and inward from between the shoulders, pulled the trigger. This time there was no hanging fire, and no failure.

The Indian gave a gasp as the back portion of his head went up into the night-air, then pitched forward heavily, and Arthur lowered the bleeding carcass to the earth. Then placing his back against a tree at hand, he allowed himself a few moments of utter repose.

The wound upon his shoulder was not severe, and as he had no means of bandaging it he quite disregarded the fact altogether, and began to feel about for the missing revolver. After a few minutes' search he was lucky enough to discover it, and thrust it into his belt.

"Now if I could be equally lucky in finding my horse," he muttered, shaping his course once more in the direction which seemed to him right. Presently he came to a narrow ravine, through which he was obliged to pass, and which he recollected traversing on his way up.

He had almost reached the further extremity when a figure moved from behind a tree, while a familiar voice exclaimed:

"Captain Ashton, that you?"

"Ah, Pimo!" the young man cried, with glad tones. "Is this really you, and are you safe and sound?"

"Me all right—hoss all right, too."

"That is good. Where is he?"

"Close here."

"Better yet. Now, Pimo, I want to have you promise me one thing. Tell nobody where we went to-night, or what happened to us. Will you do that?"

"Me say not a word."

"All right; I can trust you."

The horse was not far away, and after mounting, Arthur rode back leisurely to the mines, the Pimo keeping beside him

without any exertion. It was near morning when they reached quarters, and the Indian dressed his companion's wound before they separated.

Next day much wonder and inquiry prevailed among the miners as to the particulars of the night-ride, more especially after it was known that Arthur was wounded, but he kept his counsels, and the Pino would divulge nothing, so the curiosity finally spent itself, and died away. In a few days the occurrence was almost forgotten save by those who had participated therein.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MESSAGE AND THE STRUGGLE.

It became known in a short time after the events recorded in the last chapters, that a force of Apaches were gathering with the avowed purpose of driving the miners from their new location. At least if not known it was well surmised, and the gathering of occasional bands at a few miles' distance, and their close reconnaissances, left little room for doubt as to their intentions.

Not a day passed but more or less Apaches rode down near the mines, and after circling about upon their fleet ponies for a while, they would ride away again. At first the whites fancied an immediate attack whenever these horsemen rode into view, and remained about their quarters most of the time, ready for a desperate defense, if need be.

But when day after day passed and no hostilities took place, the idea occurred to some of the more reflective that for the present at least the savages might only wish to keep them from working the mines, which they were doing pretty effectually. It was finally decided to divide the camp, and while a part of the men worked, another part should keep guard, day and night, to make sure that no savages came upon them unawares.

This course was pursued for a number of days with good success. The Indians made no demonstration, but appeared

regularly every day, and scanned the ground. A careful observation, however, seemed to evince that the same party rarely appeared twice, and if this was indeed a fact it denoted that they were encompassed by quite a body of warriors.

One evening, after the night-shades had fairly descended, a Mexican youth came into the camp, and after casting a quick glance over those present, inquired for Arthur Ashton.

"What do you want with him?" demanded a rough-looking miner, who was cleaning his rifle, with his back against a tree. "How d'ye know thar's any sich man here?"

"I wish to see him," was the reply, with a calm dignity which did not fail to impress most of those present favorably.

The person who had spoken, however, was not very susceptible.

"Oh, ye do, eh? Wal, maybe ye're the boss of this crowd, eh?"

"Don't be foolish, Rube," remonstrated one. "Call up Arth'."

"Not till I know what business the boy has with him," was the dogged answer. "Speak up, or I'll tie ye to this tree, and strap ye down!"

"My business with him, sir, concerns you! But you will only know what it is from him. So if you will call him or tell me where he can be found, it will be a great favor to me."

The man rose to his feet, and seemed upon the point of making some harsh answer, when Arthur, having been apprised that a boy desired to see him, made his appearance. The moment he came into view, the boy moved quickly toward him, and passed, slipping a closely folded paper into his hand as he did so.

"For you," he said, and with the words he was gone.

Arthur had but a momentary view of the boy's face, but it seemed to him that he had seen the youth before. If so he could not recall the time or place, and as the boy had gone without allowing him a second glance, he could not determine in regard to the fact.

The folded paper burned in his hand strangely. No doubt it was from her, and if so it very likely required some service. What could it be, at such a time as this?

Full of unpleasant thoughts and surmises, he drew back

where no one could note the expression of his face particularly, and proceeded to unfold the little missive. It was written with a bad pencil, and not in the most elegant hand imaginable, but he managed to decipher it quite readily. It was brief, without signature or date, and ran as follows :

"You will be driven from those mines by a band of Apache braves within two days. There are two hundred of them, and they have long been studying the best way to get you out."

That was all, written in English, somewhat imperfect.

Arthur read it twice, carefully, and then mused a moment. He had no doubt it came from Niña, as it seemed scarcely possible that it could have come from any one else. But here was an inconsistency. If she was really the bloodthirsty creature she was represented, and led a band of Apache warriors, why should she thus warn the white men? He was completely mystified, but felt that it should be brought before the other miners at once.

Taking the missive in his hand he moved down through the miners, and finally stopped in front of the captain of the force.

"Captain," he said, "you saw the Mexican lad that was here but a few minutes ago, I presume?"

"No, sir, I did not. But I heard of his insolence. If I had seen him he should have been hung as a spy!"

"I beg your pardon, Captain Conrad, you would have done nothing of the kind. That boy brought a message to me, but as it concerns you as well, here it is. It has no date or signature, as you see, and you can make any use of it you see fit."

Captain Conrad scowled fiercely at the young man, for he disliked him immensely, chiefly because he was popular with the men, and would have quarreled with him had he not feared him as well. As it was he snatched the message from his hand, and ran his eyes quickly over it. Then he returned it with a contemptuous "humph!"

"What do you think of it?" Arthur asked, somewhat surprised at the man's strange conduct.

"Think of it? Why, I think just this: that it's a miserable scaly plan that some rascals have contrived to get us out

of this. They think they can get us away, and then they'd step in and take possession. I see through this, just like a book. But it never'll go down."

"But what means the constant hanging around of well-armed Apaches? Are they spending all this time for nothing?"

"If they could pick up a few stragglers, as you came near getting picked up one night," was the bitter reply, "no doubt they would do it. But we've been scared by them altogether too long already. They never will dare molest us here."

The captain turned and walked in one direction, while Arthur took another. The suspected source of the letter he could not reveal without calling for explanations which he was not privileged to make; but the young man took occasion to explain its contents to the party as he had opportunity, and it was at once agreed upon that more care should be employed in watching the movements of the savages, and guarding against a sudden attack.

To the surprise of Captain Conrad the men utterly refused to go into the mines next morning, and absolutely declared that they should only keep on the watch for Apaches till an attack was made, or until the note gave evidence of having been written with some sinister design. In vain he raved and threatened. He was alone, and at length yielded the point, swearing wildly that they should suffer for such a flagrant disobedience of his orders.

He had the wrong class of men to deal with if he wished to frighten them into compliance. All were old trappers, miners, and Indian-fighters, too familiar with danger in its worst forms to care much for the threats of a man perfectly impotent to execute them.

Noon was near at hand, and still no movement upon the part of the Indians. Some of the men began to fancy that they had been needlessly alarmed by the tidings contained in the note, and one or two had sauntered down to the lower mine, and began to dig and wash small quantities of the auriferous soil.

Thus far not an Indian had been seen since sunrise, but about this time distant clouds of dust began to rise, telling of some movement either of savages or wild animals. Soon

after, one of the outer guards came in, and reported large bodies of Indians gathering for some purpose, and evidently about to move on toward the camp. Even Captain Conrad could not gainsay this positive evidence. The men were all called in, the arms put in perfect order, and the course of events rather anxiously awaited.

"How are the men armed?" was asked of the scouts who had last come in, and who had seen the savages by the aid of a field-glass.

"Some of them with rifles, but more, probably, with bows and arrows," was the substance of the reply.

"How many of them, do you think?"

"At least two hundred!"

So far, the singular information seemed confirmed. Two hundred savages coming upon them, and but forty men in defense! A glance from one to another told to each the thoughts of his neighbor. A few moments' silence ensued, and then Captain Conrad asked:

"What say, men, shall we stay where we are?"

"Cap'n," returned a scarred man, whose life had been a succession of perils, "it's tew late now tew run, if ye wanted tew. I don't much expect one of us 'll see another day, but we shall see it here if anywhere."

"Let's stay here and give 'em Tophet!" suggested another. "It's all we kin do."

Fortunately an attack, if made at all, must be made from the front, owing to the nature of the ground, and the men were disposed so as to resist it most successfully. In selecting the ground for their cabins, the probability of Indian attack had been considered, so that nothing short of scientific fortifications could have been stronger against an assault.

Very soon the Apaches appeared, rising slowly around in a reversed circle, so that the party presented something the appearance of a large letter S. As they advanced, creeping along like a great serpent, it became evident that their numbers had not been exaggerated. There must be at least two hundred, all well mounted, and many of them bearing guns. Still they could scarcely fight to advantage on horseback, and if they were obliged to dismount, their horses would be rather an impediment than an assistance. They did not advance

very close, however. At the distance of eighty or a hundred rods they drew up in a sort of line, and sat for half an hour examining the situation before them and consulting in regard to it.

At length they seemed to have decided upon something, for several of the braves began to circle around, and finally riding up within long rifle-range of the miners, fired at them from beneath their horses' necks. Of course this kind of firing, being done upon a gallop, did no damage, but it was annoying. It would be better at the outset to teach the Apaches prudence, if civility could not be learned them.

Some of the best shots among the white men were selected and ordered to try a few bullets on the almost flying horses. If the riders could not be reached, their animals might.

Again the circling braves drew near, this time half a score in number, and coming somewhat nearer than before. Just at the proper moment, four sharp rifle-cracks in quick succession broke from the scarcely-visible defenders. One Apache tumbled and fell upon the earth, shot through the head, a horse followed with a broken leg, another galloped away wounded and uncontrollable. But one bullet of the four sped in vain.

This warm reception rather chilled the enthusiasm of the Apaches, and this manner of attack was discarded. The consultation of their chiefs could be plainly seen by the miners, but a difference of opinion seemed to exist. One party evidently wished to try a direct assault, while the other was in favor of more cautious advances.

Presently the Indians began to dismount, and soon the entire force was lying about upon the ground, with the exception of a score upon either flank, who were scattering along and working their way around and up the mountain sides.

"The miserable whelps are looking for a way to get at us," said Captain Conrad. "Or maybe they want to get a position where they can pick us off with their guns. Look out for them, boys, and if one shows his head, put a ball into it."

By permission, half a dozen men upon either flank hastened away to occupy positions with which they were familiar, promising to return at once in case their services should be wanted. After their departure there was continued silence

for some time, broken at length by several rifle-shots from the right. The interest of savages and miners alike was drawn in that direction, but the firing was brief, and in a few minutes the Indians were seen returning to their band, bearing three of their party, two dead and another wounded. The white men appeared soon after, only one of their number having been injured, and he having received but a scratch in the shoulder, which, so far from disabling him, only enraged him the more against the authors of his misfortune.

Hours passed, and night drew near, without any movement on the part of the savages. Still they lay watching the position of their enemies, as the latter also regarded them, each endeavoring to discover the purposes of the other.

"It's pretty certain, to my mind, that the red skins intend to wait till it is dark, before they fight," said Captain Conrad.

"Yes, sir," returned Arthur, who was near him, and to whom the remark seemed to have been addressed. "That has been my opinion for the last four or five hours."

"Indeed, what a wise opinion yours must be! But it is better in that way, for we shall have the advantage if they do not surround us."

"Indeed, our chances, as I see them, will be very much less in the dark. But for that reason we should have had fighting ere this."

"See here, Mr. Impertinence!" the captain broke forth, "can't I advance any proposition whatever but you must contradict it point-blank? I wish you would learn a little more the part of a gentleman."

"I said, sir, that we should lose some of our best advantages by fighting in the night, and I can prove what I say, if you will listen. In the first place, the use of our rifles at long range, which has been manifested to-day, and the difficulty of distinguishing friend from foe even at sufficient distance to use our revolvers effectually. With our advantages in these two respects gone, we shall be very nearly on an equality with the savages."

"Never mind; you needn't stop to preach any more now. If you fight well when the time comes, as I have no doubt you will, I shall overlook your impertinent manner toward me. But do try to be a little more respectful in future."

"I always respect you, sir, if you allow yourself to be respected," the youth remarked, as he turned away.

Soon after the falling of darkness it became evident that the Indians were in motion. Nothing distinct could be seen, but a confused movement, and the sound of horses' feet could be plainly distinguished.

Every man held his rifle ready for instant use, and kept eyes and ears open to catch the slightest indication that should aid him.

Presently a dark line was seen moving in front of them, indistinctly, and at the same moment a sharp discharge of musketry was opened. The balls pattered all around the defenders, and went whistling above them, but did no particular damage.

"Give the red cusses a taste o' yer rifles," sung out Captain Conrad, and in obedience to the order a line of sharp, deadly fire ran along the front of the miners' defenses.

Almost at the same time Conrad was struck in the head by a bullet, and dropped heavily to the earth.

The fire slackened in a few moments, and then the scrambling of horses' hoofs could be heard. Arthur glanced to the spot where he had seen the captain but a moment before, and was shocked to see that he had fallen. But there was no help for it, and no time to spare.

"The red skins are going to charge us," he shouted, hastening along the line. "Give them your revolvers, and be sure that you shoot none but Apaches."

The men made decided answers according to their different temperaments, and placed themselves in position to give the warmest possible reception to the Apaches. They had but a short time to wait, for the savages, fast as they could force their horses over the uneven ground, came riding up to the miners' position, but only to meet a withering, destroying volley from the deadly revolvers, which emptied their blankets and saddles they had none—and sent the horses riderless back to the advancing squads, carrying dismay and confusion to the remaining riders.

It was soon apparent to the red-skins that this mode of attack must be given up. The miners had the advantage of being close to the ground, so that only the flashes of the pistols

THE ASSAULT.

revealed their whereabouts, while the Apaches themselves were upon horseback, and fully exposed. At the same time the ground was so broken and obstructed that they could only advance very slowly, and in confusion.

A loud shout rose from the Indian advance, and in a moment more they began to retreat.

The miners gave a loud hurrah of triumph, and then fell to reloading their weapons for another attack. Two or three scouts were sent forward to observe their movements, several men among the miners that had been wounded were made as comfortable as possible, and Captain Conrad, who was upon his feet again, had the blood washed from his face and head. His injury was comparatively slight, though he had been stunned for the moment, a ball having grazed the top of his head with just sufficient force to strike him senseless for a short time.

In a few minutes the scouts returned, and reported that the Indians, having dismounted, were now preparing to advance again, this time on foot. After a momentary consultation it was decided to fall back a few rods from the present position, where the Apaches would feel almost certain of finding them, and when they had fallen into confusion by reason of the discovery, to pour in a deadly volley, and charge them with revolvers in hand.

Accordingly the party of miners moved back in perfect silence, assisting their wounded companions, who were placed in a position where they would be secure from chance shots. Crawling behind whatever could shelter them from the enemies' fire, the men waited, like tigers ready to bound upon their prey, for the moment when they could pour destruction among the red-skins.

They had not very long to wait. Presently, dark, moving forms were seen below, then they swarmed upon the log defenses, and over into the place where the miners had lain but a few minutes before. There was a momentary lull, and then a fierce yell of disappointment rose from the Apache throats. Up and over the unfenced barriers came a swarm of dark figures, and the place was literally packed with Indians.

The moment had come.

Forty dark tubes bore upon the living mass. The signal was given, and from every tube a jet of flame and messenger of death burst forth. The effect upon the Apaches was most decided. More than twenty fell with the discharge, and all were thrown into confusion. For a moment they stood utterly surprised, and that moment cost the life of many a brave. The white men clutched their rifles in one hand, and with revolvers in the other dashed into the huddled crowd of redskins with fierce yells. Instantly every other sound was drowned by the fierce cracking of the pistols. The red-men surged backward and gave ground, utterly unable to stand the deadly hail of bullets.

Very soon the miners had regained their former position, only three or four of their number having been wounded, while the ground was literally strewn with the fallen savages.

But severe as had been their loss, they were by no means ready to give up the struggle. To escape the fury of the charge the Apaches had fallen back in every direction, and when the white men came partially to a halt they began to advance again, firing with muskets and arrows, hurling hatchets, spears, and every manner of weapon.

Arthur realized at once that if they hesitated now all was lost, and springing in front of the miners, he shouted:

"Go on, drive the devils down the hill! Give it to them, boys, or they will have us foul! Follow me!"

Every word rung out like the clarion note of a trumpet, and when he had finished he was answered by a cheer.

Down the slope he went, and at his back came thirty stout men who had yet to learn the sensation of fear. A numerous body of the Apaches was before them, but it gave way as those flaming pistols advanced. The fight was terribly sanguinary. Now and then one of the bearded race fell, while the savages dropped by dozens before the deadly revolvers.

But the latter were getting empty, and when they were no longer of use the clabbed rifle was resorted to. This placed the contesting parties more nearly upon an equality as regarded weapons, but the prestige was undeniably with the whites. They were driving the Indians, had driven them from the

commencement of the fight, and broken them up into small parties, incapable of efficient action. Hither and thither the band of ferocious men went, plying their destructive revolvers unceasingly, and crushing out the different bodies of the Apaches in detail.

Gradually smaller and smaller grew the band, and the pistols flamed less defiantly, but where they went, death and dismay were carried into the ranks of the red-men. Back and forth swayed the fight, hither and thither, the savages losing ground, warriors and "spunk" at each moment.

Finally the fighting became more and more scattering, the savages seemed to disappear, and presently the miners found no foes to attack. They hastened back to their first position, on to their second, from which they had emerged to make such slaughter, and, save the fallen, that lay everywhere, not an Indian was to be seen.

"Load up, quick," was whispered along the line, and presently every chamber and cylinder and barrel was charged, ready for the expected renewal of the strife. But it did not come.

During the balance of the night scouts were out, watching and listening upon all sides for any movement of Indian forces, but all remained silent save the low conversation of the rangers as they cared for their wounded.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEXICAN BOY.

With the coming of morning light everybody was astir, for they knew not what the dawn would bring to them.

One thing it brought, at once. It brought such a scene of death and desolation as few, if any of them, had ever witnessed. The whole of the slope was covered with dead bodies, scattered weapons and pools of blood. The evidences of the fearful struggle were everywhere. Nowhere more than on the persons of the miners. Quite one-half their

number were more or less wounded, about ten were disabled, while three had been killed outright, and a fourth could not long live.

Among the Apaches the havoc had been awful. Thirty-eight dead bodies lay where the conflict had been hottest, while all the wounded had crept away, save two or three, who could not move, and many of the dead had evidently been conveyed away by their retreating friends.

None of the Indians were now in sight, and a hasty reconnaissance in different directions by the scouts failed to discover any signs of their presence. Relieved from the apprehension of an immediate attack, the miners proceeded to bury their fallen comrades, and give such rude surgical assistance to the wounded as they were able. This was not much, however, being generally a bandage with a little lint, freely wet with cold water.

But men of their robust constitution, and used to wounds and bruises, thought little of being pierced with an Indian arrow or bullet, provided it was not poisoned, of which they had a great horror. As none of the wounds in the present case gave any appearance of deadly venom, the miners were disposed to laugh at their several mishaps, and declare that if left to themselves for a few days they would be ready for another tussle with the red-skins.

While the burial-party was at work, and the unwounded miners were much scattered about, the same Mexican boy who had brought Arthur the tidings in regard to the attack, again appeared. Ashton was at the moment inside the cabin which contained the severely wounded, and the first few glances of the boy did not discover him.

Observing the dead who were in place near the almost completed graves, the boy ran quickly to the spot, and passed his eyes over each countenance in quick succession.

"What are ye a-lookin' for, boy?" the same miner who had spoken so unkindly to him on the former occasion now asked. "If ye want any thing, speak up."

"I was looking for Señor Ashton," the boy replied, in Spanish. "Can you tell me where he is?"

"In yonder cabin," said one of the party, indicating the young man's whereabouts.

The boy hastened away with quick steps, while Rube Cook growled to the one who had given him the information.

"What's the use o' yer doin' that, Bill? I wanted to have a bit o' fun with the greaser."

"I don't think I would, Rube. If it hadn't been for this greaser, as you call him, most likely we would ha' laid rottin' on these here hills. For my part I don't feel like lettin' onto a feller wha's done me a good turn."

"Don't like a greaser, nohow," growled Cook, "and never did. He don't come here for nothin', I kin give ye good warnin'. Hain't no faith in 'em, never had and never shall be."

Meantime the young Mexican approached the cabin, and looked in. As he did so Arthur saw him, and though a momentary shadow came over him with the memory of what his presence might be to demand, he stepped forward and gave him a welcome.

"Come in, my little Mexican friend," he said.

"Yis, come in," growled an old trapper, who was shot through the leg. "We want to shake hands with ye for the good ye done us all when ye come afore."

The boy advanced and placed his hand in the rough trapper's grasp.

"Yer a fine boy," the bearded sufferer pursued. "Spunky, I warrant, for one o' yer years. What a hand ye've got. Small as a gal's and plump as a quail!"

The boy withdrew his hand almost abruptly, and turned away to meet Arthur. The broad-brimmed *sombrero* which he wore was drawn low over his brow, and he avoided the hand of Ashton as the latter would have raised it.

"You were not hurt?" he said, inquiringly.

"Not at all. The Indians gave us a hard fight, but we drove them away at last."

The Mexican boy's eyes were raised to those of Arthur for a moment, and then he replied:

"That is good. I hoped you would not be hurt. I came to see. I go now. Adieu, señor."

He extended his hand, and Arthur, knowing what the result would be, grasped it. A note was pressed into his palm, and

forced upward into his sleeve. Then there was a momentary pressure, almost of tenderness, and the boy turned away. Arthur would have asked him more, but he felt too many eyes were upon them.

As the boy reached the door he was met by Captain Conrad. The latter grasped him by the arm, and dragged him back into the cabin.

"Here you, youngster," he said, bringing the lad around in front of him, "we want to know something about you. Give some account of yourself. This ain't a time when every one can be running back and forth without anybody knowing who or what they are."

"Ask your questions, señor," was the perfectly cool reply given by the boy. "What do you want to know about me?"

"You are cussed impudent to start with! Who are you?"

"A Mexican boy."

"What is your name?"

"Alvarez Nunzio."

"I don't believe it."

"That doesn't make any difference with—the name."

"Be careful, boy, or you'll be put under arrest."

"For what?—because I brought you word of the coming of the Apaches?"

"You've a dangerous tongue in your head, boy. It will cost you dear, some day. Where do you live?"

"About six miles from here."

"With your parents?"

"No."

"Do you live alone?"

"No."

"How then?"

"With friends."

"I did not know any Mexicans lived in this part of the country."

Stepping a pace closer to him, the boy remarked, in low, earnest tones:

"We never knew any American to live here long. If you advice, señor, you will leave for the States without

And while the strange tone of the speaker lingered in his ear, he allowed the boy to pass him, and move quickly away down the slope, pausing now and then to gaze at the dead Indians.

Conrad watched him a moment, and then retraced his steps till he stopped near Arthur.

"Ashton," he demanded, shortly, "what did that fellow want of you?"

"He only inquired if I was hurt in the fight," the young man returned, while the hot blood rushed to his face with the suddenness of Conrad's question.

"But he did not come here for that alone, I very well know. He has an object, and I am bound to know what that object is."

"If such be the case, I know nothing about it," returned Arthur; "so you will have to go elsewhere for your information."

Conrad bit his lip and turned short away. Outside the cabin he paused a moment and ground his teeth together, then struck the revolver which reposed in his belt.

"You'd better be careful, my boy; you'd better be careful!"

Arthur watched his opportunity, and slipped quietly away in a few moments. When alone he drew forth the note he had just received, and opened it. It was brief, and read thus:

"Be at the mouth of the smoky ravine, two miles south-west of your camp, two hours after you receive this. No Apaches will molest you."

The young man read it over twice, carefully, then tore it into minute fragments. Then he walked back into the cabin. From behind a cluster of bushes not two rods away, walked another figure—Captain Conrad. The expression upon his features was far from pleasing.

"My destiny is upon me," Arthur thought to himself. "Could I fail to go to the designated place, and not forfeit my honor, I should most assuredly do so; but, I can not, so I must go. I wonder what Fate can have in store for me—what I am to do?"

As the hour indicated drew near, Arthur took down his

rifle, and having nothing about the quarters to attend to, announced his purpose of taking a trip along the adjacent ridges, to see if any Apaches were near, and if not, to bring in some game. Several of the number offered to accompany him, but as he urged particular reasons for wishing to go alone, they did not press their requests.

Leaving camp with apparently no eye save for Apaches, the young man moved away over rough and forbidding mountain passes and gorges, till a sufficient distance had been put between him and the mines. Then moving in a nearly direct line toward the ravine spoken of, he soon found himself in the vicinity of the designated spot.

Despite his apparent carefulness, it may readily be supposed that Arthur was busy in his own mind revolving the probable issues of his present undertaking. What matter if he had accepted the alternative to save his life? The position in which he now found himself was none the less perplexing on that account. The "Red Rider" was one of the most dreaded foes the white men had to meet, and common report represented her band as the most merciless. Nor had he any reason to doubt the truth of the general report. Here he was going forth to meet this dreaded enemy of his people, alone, with no word of explanation to them, stealthily, as a traitor might go forth to meet another. What though she had given the assurance that his honor should not be involved? Who would credit any thing of the kind if his interviews with her should be discovered?

So perplexed was he, that, but for his solemn promise to heed her requests, he would have turned back, even after the mouth of the ravine stared him in the face.

He could not now, however, if he would; for no sooner had he presented himself within the opening of the cañon, than a small, lithe form appeared from behind a jutting crag, and motioned him forward.

The place was a deep gulch in the side of the mountain, and so nearly overhung with foliage that it seemed intensely gloomy within. Arthur hesitated a few minutes, but laughing at the foolish fancies which would deter him from advancing now, when he had come so far for the very purpose he stepped forward, and in a moment confronted the woman

send. She was dressed in her usual suit of red, and the same quiet, unmeaning expression rested upon her face as before.

Arthur gave one glance at the features, and then stepped back, even as he was about to take the extended hand. But he was calm again, and as he took the proffered hand, he smiled, remarking at the same time:

"It was bold of you to come to the miners' camp as you did, in the disguise of a Mexican boy."

The strange woman never changed her expression, but calmly asked:

"Was there any thing in that act bolder than there is in every day of my life?"

"Perhaps not," Arthur replied, more than ever mystified. "I can see no good reason for your strange manner of life. I wonder you pursue it."

"What do you know regarding my life?"

"Only that which rumor speaks, and the little I have seen."

"You know nothing of my life, so pray do not trouble yourself about it. Why did you come here?"

"Because you sent for me—or rather, because you came in person and brought me an invitation to come here."

"Yes, I came to you one evening, as I did not wish you killed by the Apaches, and after I had given you warning, took my own band away upon a scout so far that they did not return in time to help their fellow-braves. That is the reason your miners were not all killed or driven away. Then, to make sure as to your fate, I went up with the note this morning."

Arthur remained silent for a moment, and then he bent his eyes upon the passionless features of Niña.

"Strange woman," he asked, "why did you, who are represented as so cruel, take this risk to save the lives of the miners? One would look to see you plotting for their death, instead."

"Sister, I will answer your question, provided you will ask no more in regard to my own affairs."

"I promise," Arthur meekly returned.

"First, because I love adventure. Second, because of the results it will eventually produce. Had I not come to warn

you as I did, the Apaches would have had it all their own way. Forty Americans would have been killed with but little loss to the Apaches. That would have been the end. Now, fifty were killed in the fight last night, and as the Apaches will not rest, more than likely as many more will follow, before the contest ends. So you see there is more to be considered than merely last night. Judge whether I am tactful or not!"

To say that Arthur was astounded, portrays but faintly his feelings at this cold-blooded confession. He shuddered with horror, and then glanced up at the speaker. She was standing there just as calm and unmoved as ever, save that a faint smile wreathed her lips as she noticed the aghast expression upon the face of the listener. The parties stood in this manner for some moments before either spoke. Indeed, before Arthur could collect his ideas sufficiently to give them any expression in words, he heard a heavy step close behind him.

Turning quickly, with one hand upon a weapon, he beheld Captain Conrad, followed by half a dozen of the miners, all heavily armed.

"Here he is!" Conrad shouted, as he sprung forward; "and who's this with him? By the infernal! If it ain't the Red Rider herself! Take 'em, boys, both of 'em. Shoot if they offer to run, or make any resistance!"

Having delivered his commands with all required promptness, the doughty captain stepped back, and swung his arms with the excitement of the moment.

The miners rushed forward with their rifles presented, but there was no particular occasion for great valor. Niña folded her arms complacently upon her chest, while Arthur but stepped back among his comrades, quite overcome and bewildered by this unexpected discovery.

"Take 'em—bind 'em!" shouted Conrad, in tones of excitement. "We have got somethin' now worth playing for! Make sure of 'em, my lads. If we can rid the world of this terrible scourge we shall win a— Bind 'em, I tell you; it ain't safe to leave 'em loose a minute!"

Several of the men stepped toward the Red Rider, but at the movement she motioned them back, saying in the same calm, determined tones:

"Stop; I am no prisoner of yours. I am unarmed and upon my own domain. By what right then do you dare to touch me—woman as I am?"

"Never mind what she says. Bind her—she is our prisoner!" shouted Captain Conrad. "Do as I bid you, men!"

They moved forward a step, while the woman changed not her position.

"I warn you not to touch me," she exclaimed; "it will be at your own peril if you do!"

Again the miners paused.

"Go on, you fools!" roared Conrad.

The men advanced, and two of them grasped her arms.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

"WHAT do you propose to do with me, now?" she asked, as they clutched her tightly, bringing her hands together in front of her body.

"To tie your hands here," returned one of the twain.

"What brave men," she repeated, with as much unconcern as ever. "How necessary to bind a woman's hands, lest she do some deadly act with them! Suppose she should seize one of your fragile bodies, and shake the breath out of it, or bite it, as a dog or wolf would do? What danger you must endure, even in blinding her!"

The two men led her forward a few paces, and remained standing beside her, leaving her arms at liberty. Conrad scowled at this disregard of his orders, but turned to Arthur.

"Take away his weapons," he pursued.

"Why is that?" the young man demanded. "I deny any right of yours to arrest me. I have done nothing criminal!"

"Oh no; I dare say not," was the vindictive reply. "It is perfectly right for you to be out here talking in confidence

with this creature! What price did she offer you to betray us all?"

"Betray you, indeed!" exclaimed the woman in red. "I buy nothing; but where my true band of Apaches goes there are plenty of white men's scalps to be seen. And if I wished yours to hang in my lodge, it would be very easy to obtain it. Last night, but for me, you and your scalp would have parted company forever!"

"Ha!" cried Conrad, in great agitation, "I know you now, spy and traitor! You are the Mexican boy who talked so valiantly to me this morning! So the mystery is clearing up, is it? You and your confederate shall hang together when we reach camp!"

"So you intend to hang us, do you?" she asked, with no apparent emotion.

"That's what I do. You played the spy on us well, but you'll never do it again. Come, men, bring them along, for we've somethin' to do, now."

"Wait a moment," pursued Niña, as cool as before. "You know I said it would be perfectly easy to obtain your scalp, if I wished it to hang in my lodge. Now see!"

"Come on, I tell you," shouted Conrad, glancing all around in a nervous manner.

Niña placed a finger to her lips, and gave a sharp whistle.

All knew it to be a signal, and started with undefined terror.

They had cause. In an instant there rose from the brink of the gorge a war-whoop so loud and fierce and long that braver men than those who heard it now might well have turned to flee.

Flight or fight was equally out of the question. Two score of Apaches, brandishing their weapons and continuing those fearful yells, rushed upon the little band of miners, and bore them to the earth.

Robt Cook, who was standing near Niña at the moment, seeing the turn affairs were likely to take, produced a pistol and attempted to shoot her; but before he could discharge it an Apache hatchet sunk through his brain, and he fell upon the rough stones, a corpse.

In less time than it takes to comprehend it, the struggle was

ended. Every white man was forced upon the ground, disarmed, and secured by thongs of dried skin. Arthur was among the rest. When it was done the Red Rider walked calmly from one to another, regarding them with the same cold, expressionless look as before.

"Well, captain," she said, stopping beside Conrad, as he lay writhing upon the ground, "the tables are turned, as you Americans say. What do you think of this?"

"Fond traitor, murderess, you shall suffer for this!" he growled, grinding his teeth together as though he would crush her in the same manner.

"Stop there," the woman exclaimed, with a stern emphasis. "You know I proposed to show you how easy it would be to obtain your scalp. Now suppose I illustrate that by taking it off myself, and showing it to you?"

She seized a knife from one of the triumphant savages, and stepped close to the prostrate captain. That individual shut his eyes with a heavy groan, and awaited the expected torture. But as it did not come he opened them at length, and saw that Niña had moved away from his vicinity.

She had stepped to the place where Arthur lay vainly tugging at his bonds, and after cutting them she assisted him upon his feet. His weapons were then restored to him, and Niña requested him to remain near while she attended to the other captives. Realizing that all efforts to leave the place against the wishes of the red-skins and their woman commander would be utterly useless, the young man stepped back among the warriors, and waited the result of the strange proceedings.

Seeing that Captain Conrad was attentive to her movements, the Red Rider stepped up to him, and exclaimed:

"So you have regained your senses. I really supposed that the man who could talk so bravely to a poor Mexican boy who had brought him information of the Apaches could see an unsheathed knife without fainting! How would you like to be built into a wooden oven and baked alive?"

The man made no reply to this bantering threat save to writhe and groan.

"Or how would you like to be wounded with poisoned arrows and feel the venom creeping all through your veins, and

freezing your blood, while you could see a remedy close at hand, but never, never get it?"

"Fiend," he finally gasped, while great drops of cold sweat stood upon his brow, "leave me!"

"Yes, I will leave you," she said. "But it may be you would be glad to have me come to you again, by and by."

Turning to her followers she delivered a few commands in their language, which none of the white men understood. The Apaches acted upon it at once. Grasping the men, bound as they were, they dragged each to a tree, and lashed them there securely, near the mouth of the ravine. They were placed at such distances from each other that none could reach a neighbor, and their distance from any friends gave but faint reason to hope for any assistance from them.

Having satisfied herself in every instance that the bonds were strong, and escape out of the question, Niña stepped again in front of the object of her especial persecution, and remarked:

"Now, my valiant captain, we shall leave you. As the miners will be attacked by the Apaches again in a day or two it is very likely you will be found, and set at liberty. If not there are plenty of wolves and other vermin prowling through the forest, so you will not likely be very lonesome."

Then turning to Arthur she continued:

"Come on, my cavalier; your fortunes are cast with mine, for a time, at least. I would offer you the use of a horse, but mine is some distance away, and my braves have need of theirs. As we do not travel far, however, you will scarcely feel the need of one."

"Am I to consider myself your prisoner?" he asked, quite uncertain as to the relation in which he stood to the party.

"No, señor, not my prisoner, but my guest," she returned, with a peculiar emphasis. "My guest by force of circumstances. You can do nothing else at present, unless you have lived long enough; in that case it may be you could succeed in getting rid of your life."

"But this will make it seem as though I was really a traitor to my miner friends," said Arthur, a little reluctant to accompany the Apaches into their mountain fastnesses, he knew not where.

"What matter?" Niña asked. "You dare not return now and release your comrades, for they would hang you in an hour. You dare not go to your camp again, for you would be considered a traitor, and served accordingly. You can not go to your people, for they are beyond the Apaches, and you can not penetrate hundreds of miles through their territory. You can only remain with me for the present."

Almost instinctively he had been walking near her while they conversed, and now the band had fallen in behind them, so that he could not well refuse to proceed. His brain was in a whirl, and the words of his scarlet-clad companion seemed to increase his confusion.

"So, without having performed a single act of which I could reasonably be accused, if all the facts were known," he mused to himself, "I find myself an outlaw, a renegade; compelled to flee my own kind, and seek protection with one who has won the name of 'fiend.' How is it to end? Is not fate weaving her meshes about me as a spider weaver about a fly? If so, the probabilities are that I may try to free myself from them one of these days and not be able. Then what? Well, then will be time enough to think about what is to be done. I have provoked this myself, so if I lose by it 'tis my own fault."

After walking a short distance they came upon the Apaches' horses, kept by a guard, where their route took them near the open prairie. Here the animals had been feeding while the riders went forward upon their peculiar mission. It happened that they had two spare animals, one of which was turned over to Arthur.

The entire party mounted at a signal from their leader, and went scouring away over the open field. Turning in his saddle as they passed a point which gave an extended view to the rear, Arthur saw a scout standing upon an eminence watching their movements. A strange thrill passed over his frame at the recognition. It seemed as though he was taking a farewell glance at all he had ever known before, and about to plunge into a dark wilderness of fated mystery.

In a few moments they had passed from the sight of the white scout, and Arthur was riding alone with his guard of

two-score savage Apaches, under a still more savage leader.

"This is what morbid curiosity has led me to," he reflected; "who can tell where it will end?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE BROKEN FEAST.

NEAR the north-eastern confines of the Mexican State of Soñora, lies a little town, nestled among the mountains, named Bernardino. Beautifully located, with a dancing stream of water, cold and sparkling like the mountain air from which it descends, the place needs but the gentle reign of peace and the best adaptations of man's enterprise to make it one of the finest and most romantic places of habitation in that favored land.

As it was at the time of which we write, and as it is now, no material change having taken place, the town had long been divided and distracted by the political disturbances and revolutions which continually distress the country, upon the one hand, and Indian raids and depredations on the other.

But once in the period of its existence the troubled town saw a joyful scene. General Jose Escuden, whose comfortable residence, seated apart from and above the others, as though in scorn and superiority, appeared a palace in comparison with the lowly huts which formed the body of the town, had lighted up and opened his extensive apartments and issued invitations to all the more respectable portion of the townspeople to be present that evening.

The occasion of this unusual demonstration was no more or less than the marriage of the General's son, Jecasio Escuden, to the adopted daughter of the house, Zyra Fonseca. Preparations of unusual magnitude had been made. Music and dancing were to be the principal exercises, while wine and eatables in abundance had been provided, to refresh the bodies of the assembled revelers.

The house was filled with those thus gathered, all waiting anxiously the arrival of the priest, that the nuptial rites might be celebrated, and the dancing commence. The marriage had been fixed upon for the hour of ten, after which the party would enjoy itself till morning in such manner as pleased them.

But the designated hour had passed, and no priest was yet in attendance.

"What detains Padre Ramirez?" every one asked of his neighbor, but no one could answer.

Meantime General Escuden, with his son and the bride expectant, were constantly surrounded by a circle of devoted friends, who were bestowing their congratulations in the most profound and profuse manner. As we shall have somewhat to deal with these characters, it may be as well, while awaiting the coming of the padre, to present them briefly to the reader.

General Jose Escuden was a man who had seen near fifty years of war and wear. His aspect was dark and rather forbidding. His keen, black eyes might have once sparkled with love and tenderness, but if so those passions seemed to have died out long since, and left nothing but sternness of purpose in their place. He was a tall, powerfully-made man, and his iron frame seemed to retain all the strength and vigor of early manhood. He was dressed in full uniform, rich in gilt and glitter, and strode the apartment with a firm, dignified step. All in all, one would judge from the first appearance of the man that he might be a valiant soldier, and a desirable champion, but never a true, kind-hearted friend.

Jesio Escuden, the son, was of a smaller and rather fragile frame, pale and hollow-eyed. In person he seemed rather effeminate, yet he was a young man of very decided will and purpose, and report said he was vindictive and cruel to excess. Like his father, he was richly dressed, and strode about with an air of pride and consequence.

Quite unlike what might have been expected, in appearance, was Lyra Fonseca, the bride of the occasion. Of medium stature, with a finely-developed figure, graceful and chaste in all its proportions, and a face of earnest, lively beauty, she was a realization of ideal loveliness more perfect

than often found in that country, with all its wealth and variety of beauty.

But with all the favorable surroundings, Lyra was not happy. The eyes which could concentrate so much of soul into a single glance were bent upon the floor, and when required to answer the many congratulations bestowed upon her, it seemed a painful duty.

The truth may be briefly stated: she did not love the man she was about to wed, and her soul shrunk from the union, but the will of General Escuden was law to his own household, as well as to the denizens of Bernardino in general.

Six years the maiden had been an unwilling member of the General's family, but there was no law or help for her against him, and now her whole life was to be sacrificed to the pleasure of the despot and his son. None knew whence she came, and if any felt a curiosity to inquire they dared not so far meddle with the affairs of the Escudens.

The weary minutes wore away, and the padre came not. The assembled company grew impatient. The musicians snapped their strings. The General, glancing at his watch, turned to a servant.

"Order the musicians to tune their instruments," he said. "We will dance till the holy father comes. Lead up, Jedosio, and take your place for the dance."

The young despot gave his arm, and with a heavy heart Lyra took her place for the dance. She felt infinitely more like retiring to her apartment to weep, but her own inclinations were not to be consulted.

The dance commenced. Not the stately contra-dance, brilliant quadrille, bewitching polka or waltz of which visions may rise to the reader's mind, but the wild, wierd, irregular figure peculiar to the Mexicans. As it waxed more and more lively, the musicians accelerating the time as the dancers became imbued with the spirit of the movements, Lyra seemed partly to forget the Creole's fate which was but momentarily postponed, a tremor of joy danced in her eyes, and a flush of transparent color mantled her cheeks. If she had been lovely before she was entrancing now.

Suddenly, during the midst of the dance, there were sounds of excitement at the door. Then a hurried tramping of feet,

and the door of the parlor where the guests were enjoying the dance was thrown open. General Escuden hurried that way, to learn the cause of the singular intrusion, and was met by the servant of Padre Ramirez, who, covered with perspiration and dust, and trembling with fear, stood for some moments before the General ere he was able to speak.

"Santa Maria!" he finally managed to ejaculate, "the padre can not come. He is killed, I fear; the Apaches—"

"The Apaches! What is that you attempt to say? Speak, man!" the General thundered, as the poor fellow stammered and became silent.

Alarmed quite as much by the manner of General Escuden as he had been by the savages, the servant dropped to his knees, and holding up trembling hands before the august master, managed to articulate:

"The holy father and myself started out upon our mules, señor, and when about half-way here there rose from the earth around us a crowd of yelling savages, who fired upon us, and I suppose killed my master. My own mule was frightened and is now dying in the street from wounds."

"Out of the way, coward!" cried the General, spurning the trembling fellow with his foot, and hastening to the door.

A single glance convinced him that no time was to be lost. Already the shouts of the Apaches could be heard in the street below him, and occasional reports of fire-arms were mingled with the cries of the citizens. He almost wondered that his own dwelling, brilliantly lighted as it was, had not been among the first attacked.

Snatching the door he returned to the hall. The rumor had already spread so far that the music had ceased, and the dancers, gathered in pale, anxious knots, were waiting for his return. Long experience in Indian raids had shown him the best course to pursue, and he hesitated not a moment to command the measures he deemed necessary.

"Those who have no weapons, haste to the west mountains," he cried, "and wait there till the Apaches have left the place. Those who can fight stay with me!"

He hurried to his own apartment, and had soon provided himself with a sword and pair of pistols. While buckling them on he hastened to return, that he might arrange his

assisting servants and friends for the defense of the place. He found the face of affairs materially changed.

Jedosis Escuden, on hearing the command of his father, sprung toward a side entrance, dragging Lyra by the hand, striking those in advance to the right and left, shouting as he did so:

"Make way for the bride!"

By this means he succeeded in gaining the door in advance of the crowd which pressed behind him, and threw it open. But it was only in time to meet his doom.

A fierce yell and volley of musketry greeted his appearance, and he staggered back, bleeding from several deadly wounds. The door was immediately closed and bolted, and the panic-stricken crowd rushed rapidly toward the other side of the building.

All deserted the dying Jedosis save she who was that night to have been a bride. She remained beside him while the last throes of mortal agony convulsed his frame, and then fled from the presence of death, just as the door was burst open by the furious savages.

She ran into the parlors, filled with a multitude of paralyzed, distracted human beings, incapable of thought or motion. All around the house the savages were now whooping and yelling, so that none could escape in any manner, while a part of the gang, as already stated, had forced an entrance, and were now almost in the midst of the late festive throng.

With unusual presence of mind Lyra turned the key in the door as she entered the parlors, but it stayed the savages only a moment. The door was burst open, and half a dozen muskets were discharged into the midst of the huddled, frightened wretches. Shrieks and groans arose from all sides, drowned in and chorused by the yells of the savages.

One of the party caught sight of Lyra before the smoke of the discharge filled the room, and he sprung forward and grasped her by the hair. The maiden shrieked, for she expected a sudden death, but the savage seemed to have other views. Dragging her into one corner he feasted his eyes upon her beauty for a moment, and then struck her plump shoulders with an expression of satisfaction.

Calling to another brave who had just entered the room,

he communicated with him for a moment in the Apache tongue. The brave seemed to signify his acquiescence, for he bowed very respectfully, and took Lyra by the hand.

"Go with him," the one who had first caught her exclaimed, in rather poor Spanish, which can not be rendered literally; "you not be any hurt. Me big chief—come by-by and take care you myself."

The maiden was borne to the open air in time to prevent her from fainting, owing to the confusion, fear and excitement of the dreadful scene through which she was passing. Here the cool air breathed upon her brow, and she was presently restored again to comparative self-possession, despite the awful scenes being enacted about her.

General Escuden entered the apartment just after the firing of the musketry, which he wrongly enough supposed came from his servants and friends in defense. He was undeceived the moment he opened the door. The room was full of powder-smoke, while groans of pain came from those who had so lately been in the light of enjoyment.

The realization of the truth in the matter, with the fiendish yelling and whooping of the savages, for the moment overthrew the established self-possession of the old soldier. This brief hesitation sealed his fortunes.

The savages had noticed his entrance, chiefly from his rich dress and martial bearing, and when he paused in momentary dismay, three or four of them threw themselves upon him, and succeeded finally in binding and disarming him. This was not done without a struggle, however, as Escuden was more than a match for any two Indians in the party, and nearly all received severe bruises before they succeeded in binding him. Could he have produced his weapons, a much more sanguinary struggle would have taken place.

When finally secured, the General was given into charge of a couple of stalwart Apaches, and conducted to the side of his first captor, upon a small eminence not far from the building. There were a few brief words of recognition, and then neither spoke more, for each was too busy with the dreadful thoughts which went coursing through their brains.

Having satisfied themselves that no more were present whom they cared to take away as captives, the Apaches let

loose the worst passions of their fiendish, bloodthirsty natures.

We drop the curtain before the scene which ensued. Fiends might have wept with pity, and humanity would sicken with loathing at the horrible picture, should its description be attempted.

CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHT FLIGHT.

GENERAL ESCUDEN and Lyra Fonseca remained upon the hill for some time under the care of two braves, while the balance of the party plundered the town, soaking its streets with the blood of all who came in their way. Finally, a tall savage, with something dignified in his bearing, approached them. He scanned the features of the General closely, and felt of his clothing.

Then he addressed him in Spanish, which he spoke so as to be perfectly understood.

"You are a great man; a warrior," he said, carelessly.

"I should have shown you," the General replied, "if I could have been assisted by a few good men."

"Good. But you would have been killed, and the Apaches would have been much disappointed. Now we take you with us. How many mules will you give us to come back again pretty soon?"

"So you will hold me for ransom, will you?" demanded the General, growing more hopeful. "My friends shall send you thirty mules."

Rather excited at the prospect of saving his life at almost any price, he had spoken the first number that came to his mind. The chief, shrewd and keen to discern the motives of men, realized that the idea of death would bring a more liberal offer from the captive.

"That is not enough," he said; "my braves would rather torture you than take that number of mules for a ransom. Say a hundred."

"Not so many," urged the General, fearing lest the number

demand would be greater than could be procured, without more pains than his friends would care to assume.

"The country is very poor, and so many could not be obtained. I will pledge you that fifty shall be given."

But this number was not satisfactory, and finally it was agreed to give and accept sixty. General Escuden would have claimed his release upon the agreement, but to this Gih-kan-yen interposed a strong objection.

"You shall go with us," he said, "and wait with us for the mules to come. You can leave word for your friends, and if they do not come, no matter!"

General Escuden felt uneasy at this particular moment. He could not help thinking that the Apaches would rather prefer to roast him. He made a few more inquiries as to the sending of the mules, and then drew a memorandum-book and pencil from his pocket. He wrote at guess, for he could see nothing in the starlight, save the white surface of the paper, and then, tearing out the leaves, folded them together. Gih-kan-yen had produced a stick, and having thrust one end of it between the folds of the note he fixed the other in the ground.

A sigh from Lyra drew the General's attention.

"My daughter," he said, sadly. "What ransom for her?"

"She can not be ransomed," was the quick reply. "She must be my wife!"

A low cry of mortal terror and despair broke from the maiden as she heard this announcement, and she sunk upon the earth; but the General seemed to feel very little annoyed at the answer. Indeed, from his manner one might have supposed him rather gratified by the chief's determination.

"Never mind," he said, as Lyra continued to weep and groan. "There are many things in this world worse than being the wife of an Apache chief. You will be his favorite no doubt, and as there is no help for it you must submit with as good grace—"

"There is help for it," returned the maiden, with spirit. "I will never be his wife, or rather his victim, for that is all he means, if I have to kill myself to avoid it. I am determined upon that!"

"Do not be unreasonable," urged Escuden. "The tra—"

way will be to meet your fate with perfect indifference, and if I can ever assist you to leave him, I shall certainly do so."

Amid the maiden's tears there was an expression of rebellion and determination which the General did not perceive, and he had no further opportunity for conversation, as the chief, Giah-kan-yen, at that moment came nearer to them.

"It is time for us to march," he said. "The signal-fire will soon call in my men, and you shall go to my home among the mountains."

A small signal-fire was presently kindled by one of the guards, and when its flame was visible the savage spirits came pouring up from the town. They had found a number of household mules, upon one of which Lyra was mounted, while General Escuden was compelled to go on foot, and keep pace with the rapid movements of his conductors. It was mortifying to him to be treated thus, and very severe exercise was required to keep up with the riders, but he managed to do it until morning, when he fell exhausted, and the speedy death with which he was threatened failed to arouse him.

When his captors satisfied themselves that he absolutely could not walk further, he was mounted upon one of the pack-mules, and allowed to ride for a time.

After getting clear of the Mexican territory the party pursued its way quite leisurely, and finally came to a halt in the afternoon, and made preparations for passing the night. A lodge was built for the chief, Giah-kan-yen, and Lyra was placed in it but General Escuden was tied to a tree in the midst of the encampment.

The horror which came over the maiden at finding herself in this dreadful and embarrassing position exceeds description. For a long time she remained half insensible from the very intensity of her emotions. Numerous desperate resolves suggested themselves to her mind, but all were relinquished for the present. Giah-kan-yen was absent, and not till he returned would she suffer wrong. Possibly before that time something would transpire to prevent his purpose, or assist her.

Something did transpire to quiet her fears, though not to bring permanent relief. A gun in the hands of a brave was accidentally discharged, and the chief was shot through the

High, so severely that he could scarcely move without assistance. The careless brave was at once divested of his gun, and provided with bow and arrow, as a lesson of caution. Giah-kan-yen was borne back to camp, and the best skill of the party employed in dressing the wound. It was an ugly visitation, and in consideration of its character the band resolved to seek out a fastness near by, and make a permanent camp.

Some five miles distant the desired locality was found, an inaccessible position among the rocks, and to that place the camp was transferred. Here Lyra and her foster-father remained, close prisoners, and though one expected and the other watched for an opportunity to regain liberty, neither were gratified.

Several weeks passed away, and during that time the wounded chief suffered severely. At times it seemed the nature of his wound, aggravated by indifferent treatment, would bring his death, but finally he began to amend, and the ugly opening commenced healing.

One day, while the sun shone in all its splendor, and the earth seemed clad in a mantle of rejoicing, Lyra stole to the side of General Escuden, and seated herself there. There was a frown upon his dark features, and he scarcely looked up as she drew near. But the maiden was not entirely daunted by his cold demeanor. She had something of great importance upon her mind, and she resolved to communicate with him if he would but listen.

"General," she said, for terms of endearment never passed between them, "is it not full time that you should receive your liberty?"

"I should think so," he growled, in reply; "but the cursed mules have not come yet."

"What can cause the long delay, suppose you? Can it be that your friend, Don Manuel, failed to get your note?"

"It may be," returned General Escuden, gloomily.

"Or possibly, General, I have been thinking—that perhaps—"

"Well, what have you been thinking?"

The maiden proceeded with some hesitation, not knowing how what she had to say might be received.

"I had thought it just possible, that Don Manuel might

not be so earnest a friend to you in adversity as he has seemed at the time you were with him. Don Manuel could be the head of Bernardino, and all the country about would do him the reverence it has done you, if you should fail to be ransomed."

"Girl, what are you saying?" he demanded, sharply. Then, after a momentary silence, he pursued: "I know what you suggest may be true. I can not help thinking at times it must be. If so I am miserably fallen, indeed. If Don Manuel had intended to send the mules for my ransom he should have done it long ago. Either he knows not, or will not."

"Then, General, why not let us try to effect our own freedom? Now that we have so much liberty, I feel almost sure that we can escape."

"How foolish you are, Lyra. What could you do, even if allowed to leave this place when you saw fit? You could never reach Soñora, or at least not if any band of Indians felt disposed to pick you up."

"But, General," the girl urged, "I could meet no worse fate there than here. I will try to reach Soñora, but if I do not, I shall at least escape this living death."

"And where will you go, provided you reach Soñora?"

The girl understood his meaning.

"Why will you not go with me?" she asked. "We can leave one at a time, and agree upon a place of meeting."

General Jose Escuden bowed his head as though in a reverie, for some moments, and then he asked:

"Where could we meet, in case you went out first?"

A beam of joy danced in the girl's eyes.

"Anywhere you say, General, so we can both easily find the place."

"I'll think of it, Lyra, and let you know before night."

The maiden was more pleased than she could well tell. Not for a long time had Escuden spoken to her so kindly as now. With a thrill of excited joy she returned to the lodge which had been erected for her by command of Gish-kan-yen, and sat down to reflect and plan.

When they met again the General was the first to speak, which he did in a low, muffled tone, in order not to excite the particular notice of the Apaches.

"What think you, my Lyra; shall we make the attempt to-night?"

"Oh yes, indeed, if you will!" she replied, with a glad smile.

"And do you know the way to the place where we lay when Giah-kan-yen was wounded?"

"Oh, yes; I think I can find it in the dark."

"And did you notice some distance back of that, a large ledge of rock?"

"I did."

"Then try to find that ledge, and upon it you may lie hidden in safety. I will let you go first, and will try to come to-night. If you find a good place to remain, you had best stay to-morrow, and then if I do not rejoin you, go on to Soñora. Do you agree to this?"

"Certainly, General."

A few minor arrangements were made, and then the parties separated, that the Indians might not suspect their plans. Lyra retired to her lodge, and threw herself upon the couch of boughs.

She arranged her plans as fully as could be done in advance, and then waited with feverish impatience the sinking of the sun, and the coming of darkness. How slowly time passes when we would have it hasten!

Lyra had no preparations to make as such. With a view to this very possibility, she had, since sufficient liberty was given her, adopted a practice which she felt would be of help to her. Not far from the confines of the camp, a mountain-stream dashed by, in all its laughing, singing freedom. To this she often repaired with a water gourd, to bathe her hands and face in the sparkling rivulet, and sigh for the freedom it enjoyed. Frequently she would wander along its margin for short distances, remaining absent from the camp hours in succession. This custom she believed had paved the way for her escape, as she would get some start in time, and the darkness would not allow of her being immediately followed. If her father joined her at the appointed rendezvous in good time, all would promise well. To render the pursuit more uncertain she appropriated a pair of the buckskin moccasins worn by the Apaches, which could be worn

over her Mexican shoes, and form an additional protection for her feet.

These she carefully concealed, and then taking her gourd, she began her movements. At the brook she was detained some time by the presence of several Apache women, but finally she carefully filled the gourd, and placed it upon a rock. Seating herself beside it she remained thus while several of the Apaches came and went. As there was nothing unusual in her sitting thus, she was not disturbed, and finally the increasing quiet told that the Indians were giving themselves up to sleep.

Putting her trust in the Virgin, as she had been taught in early life, she sprang across the little rivulet, and down a stony slope beyond, thence shaping her course toward the designated place of rendezvous.

She was about to draw the moccasins upon her feet when it occurred to her that if they were reversed, with the toes beneath her heels, the trail would be more effectually blinded.

She succeeded in fastening them in the manner suggested upon her small feet, and then tripped forward upon her way, her heart bounding with hope and anticipation.

Poor Lyra; she little knew the magnitude of her undertaking, or the strange developments which were to result from it!

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER.

ARTHUR ASHTON accompanied the Apaches upon their journey back to the mountain fastnesses, and a lodge was constructed for him near the one occupied by Niña. But although the Indians seemed to regard him with tolerable favor, the young man had never felt so dissatisfied in his life. As the reader may have seen, he was reckless and impulsive, to a fault. In fact, his whole life was shaped by recklessness. His present situation was reached by the mad fancies which he had followed, and the results they had brought. Appa-

rently he was in direct opposition to the whites with whom he had come to that region. He was allied to one of the most famed and bloodthirsty gangs of Indians in the whole of New Mexico. He had apparently been caught in the act of communicating with the woman leader of the party, one whose course had been such as to win her the sobriquet of "Gend." He was not a prisoner; he was free to go when and where he pleased, but for his life dared not return to his late comrades, as he would certainly be met with the halter. Neither did he like the idea of remaining where he now was. The fact that he was far from a favorite among the red-skins was quite apparent. Not a day passed but the probabilities of his being murdered in cold blood by some of the Apaches increased. He felt a determination to leave the place growing stronger within him. He would endeavor to regain his friends, in more civilized lands, and become a man again. But how to go? He dared not undertake to make his way back to Texas direct, for the country was swarming with Indians, and he would stand no possibility of ever seeing the land he sought. North and west lay an interminable wilderness. South through Mexico seemed the only avenue still open, and even that was hedged with dangers.

While still in this quandary and uncertainty, an event occurred which he may or may not have expected, and which brought matters to a crisis.

One evening, while wandering at a little distance from camp, he heard a sharp sound, as though of a stick suddenly broken. He turned to behold an Indian, sitting partially concealed from view. He paid little attention to the fact until he noticed that the red-skin was beckoning to him, when he went that way, and was quite astonished to behold his former friend and guide, the Pimo. They greeted each other in a low voice, and then Arthur asked:

"What brings you here into this dangerous spot, Pimo?"

"Me come to see you," was the brief answer.

"Why?"

"Diggers come here to fight. They want to hang you."

"Do you mean the miners are coming here to surprise this camp of Indians?"

"He do."

"Where is Captain Conrad? How does he know where to come?"

In his own peculiar, broken way, the Pimo proceeded to state that he had been a witness of the entire scene between the miners and Apaches, and when the latter retreated, with Arthur among them, he had scrambled down and liberated the white men, much to their joy. Captain Conrad, boiling with rage, had hastened back to camp, and began plotting for a raid upon the Apaches in their own retreats. This the more reckless of the white men had finally succeeded in discovering, and now the purpose of the miners was to fall upon the place in the night, and sweep the particular band, with its woman leader, from the face of the earth. Pimo's purpose was to save Arthur from the fate which had been planned for him, believing as he did that the young man was innocent of any intentional guilt.

Having delivered himself of the message, and knowing the danger he was in, the Pimo withdrew, and Arthur, convulsed now with more conflicting opinions than ever before, started upon his return to camp.

It was quite dusk, so that objects were indistinct at a little distance. As he hurried along, the young man was aware of a slight movement in the bushes, a little way from his route, and the next moment something grazed his arm. Glancing at the wounded member, he saw an arrow hanging in the punctured clothing. In a moment he held a revolver in his hand, but seeing a single Indian springing through the forest, he refrained from firing after him, and as the wound was but a scratch, took the arrow in his hand and proceeded into camp. He had almost reached his quarters, when he noticed a peculiarity of formation in the missile, and upon examining it more closely, was surprised to find that it was poisoned!

The wound in his arm already began to smart and become irritated, and for a moment he felt almost horror-stricken. Just then Niña passed him.

"See here," he said, abruptly, for a few days' acquaintance had caused him to assume a sort of familiar air, which was never returned by Niña in any manner. "One of your rascally cowards has shot me with a poisoned arrow. Is that a part of the play proper?"

"What is that?" she asked, with more emotion than she usually expressed. "Some one wounded you? Let me see."

She hastened to a small fire which was smoldering not far away, and seized a brand. Then drawing Arthur into the lodge, she held it so near that the discolored flesh was distinctly illuminated.

"Yes, you are poisoned, but it is not too late to help you. I can cure it—shall I?"

"Certainly," the young man returned. "I risk my life carelessly enough, but I don't like to go off this way."

Niña drew a Mexican dagger from her clothing, and laying bare the arm, proceeded to gash the wound, drawing the blood freely, and causing the young man intense pain, although he made no demonstration.

When the flow of blood had ceased somewhat, she applied her lips to the double wound and sucked out the mingled blood and poison. When this was done, she produced some half-dried leaves, and having chewed them into a sort of pulp, proceeded to place them upon the wound, and secure them with a sort of rude bandage.

"There," she exclaimed, when this was done, "you are as good as new, save the blood you have lost, and that is nothing. Now you have me to thank again for your life."

"Very true, and I do thank you. But there is one thing I'd like to know."

"What is it?"

"Why have you repeatedly spared my life?"

"Because I have fancied I was able to make a better use of you than to let you die. I think so still. Another thing: you wanted to know who and what I am. I wished to let you find out."

"But you do not tell me."

"Nor do I intend to. For a time, people will know me as the "woman fiend." Perchance if they knew all they would call me something else—something worse, it may be. I am quite content with that appellation. Some time people may know why I have taken the part I have."

"Have you any confidants?"

"None. These savages know as much of me as you, and

not any more. I am a mystery to every one—quite as much to myself as any one else.”

“But suppose that in some of your wild undertakings you should fall? Would no one know—?”

“Young man, I will tell you this much, and this only. I have a purpose to accomplish, and if I die before that is done, no person shall know what I have attempted and failed to achieve. If I succeed, I shall let all the world into my secret, and what afterward will become of me I know not—I care not.”

The young man sat in silence a few moments. Then the Red Rider proceeded:

“You can go now, for I have told you all you will ever know till my work is done. Let that, for the present, satisfy your curiosity.”

The young man arose and retired to his own tent. As he did so, he saw a stealthy figure gliding away from it. He felt sure it was the assassin who had already endeavored to take his life, but paid no further attention to the matter than to strike a light and see that the lodge was clear before he entered it.

Within he waited but a moment—only long enough to secure his rifle and ammunition, and a few pieces of dried meat, which he had preserved for such an occasion.

Leaving the place quietly, and making quite sure that he was not pursued, Arthur made his way to the horses, and selected the animal which had been set apart for his use.

Placing his blanket upon its back, he adjusted the apology for a bridle, and sprung upon the blanket, then allowed the horse to pick its way through the forest toward the south.

As he left the place, probably forever, Arthur looked back with a sigh of regret that he could know no more of the strange Niña, the famed Red Rider. What he had been able to learn only awakened his interest the more, and yet it was very evident that any attempt to stay in that place longer would cost his life, in one manner or another.

Nor could he help a feeling of anxiety concerning her fate. If the camp was surprised by the miners, he had no doubt she would fall into their hands—the result he dared not consider. He would have warned her, but this would involve

the destruction of his late associates, and that he could not think of.

So he could only ride away, and hope to secure his own safety, leaving the rest to fate.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND FOUND.

It may readily be supposed that Lyra Fonseca found no little trouble after leaving the vicinity of the Apache camp. She found it very slow and tedious work to proceed, as it was quite dark, and the various obstructions she met would have quite discouraged her had the reason for her flight been less urgent. But if she ever wavered, the memory of Giah-kan-yen would come before her, and she would struggle on again.

It began to seem to her that she must have passed the place of her destination, but if so she could discover no traces of any familiar spot. Harassed with conflicting doubts and fears, the maiden finally sunk to the earth, and being overcome by weariness, and unable to decide upon any further course of action, she finally fell asleep.

The gray of coming dawn was distinctly visible when she awoke, and with a start she sprung to her feet. Every thing looked wild and strange. She gazed first to the right, and then to the left, but nothing familiar appeared.

"Oh, I am lost, lost!" she exclaimed. "I may have passed the place of meeting, and perhaps General Escutlen is already there, waiting, and wondering what has happened to me. Oh, what a poor, worthless creature I am!"

She determined to lose no more time, but push on and see if she could not make some discovery which would lead her to the place she wished to reach.

Here a new cause of alarm presented itself. She knew not in which direction to go! While wandering during the night she had kept her compass, or supposed she had, but

now she knew not which direction she came from to reach the place where she had slept, and consequently the direction to take was lost in uncertainty.

"What shall I do?" she moaned, throwing herself upon the ground, and giving way to a flood of tears. "If I remain here I shall soon be discovered and taken back. If I attempt to proceed I shall be just as likely to wander back toward them as to go in the direction I wish to take. However, I can no more than fail, so I will go on, hoping my course may be the right one."

She took what seemed to her the preferable direction, if there could be any preference when all was uncertainty.

She had gone but a very little distance, when she heard the tramping of a horse not far away, and hastened to screen herself behind a tree. But it was too late. She was seen, and the horseman came directly toward her.

A deep feeling of alarm came over her. She sunk upon the earth, determined not to move, and hoping for death upon the spot rather than a return to the tents of Giah-kan-yen. In a moment the horseman had ridden up beside her and halted. For the first time she looked up, and was very agreeably surprised to see that it was not one of the Apaches, but a white man. And what was more, he was young, kindly-featured, and handsome.

A thrill of hope went to her heart, and forgetting her late determination, she rose quickly to her feet. The young man sat and gazed at her for a moment, and then asked, in Spanish:

"Who are you?"

"A poor Mexican girl, señor, Lyra Fonseca. Oh, you will help me, I know you will!"

"I see I was wrong in my suppositions," the young man returned. "But if I can help you, ask me and it shall be done. You have been crying; what is the matter?"

"First please tell me if you are a friend of the Apaches," said the poor girl, fearing lest her confidence might in some manner be illy bestowed.

"No, señorita," Arthur replied, for Arthur it was, as the reader may have more than suspected; "I am not a friend of the Apaches, scarcely a friend of anybody else. But if I

can be your friend, say the word, and I'll give up all the interest I have in the rest of the world, if need be!"

Her sweet, tearful beauty had touched the best chords of his nature, and he felt now how willingly he would face death if thereby he could serve or benefit the beautiful wanderer.

"Oh no," said the maiden, "you should do nothing like that, señor. I am a poor girl, trying to escape from the Apaches, and have lost my way. If you can set me right, so that I can make one more endeavor to reach Mexico, I shall be your friend forever."

"That is the very route I am pursuing, myself," said the young man. "So if you can tell me the best way to take, I can go along with you, and you can ride upon my horse."

"Oh, I thank you, señor, but I must wait for my father!"

The young man's countenance fell most decidedly, but he listened with patience and interest to the brief story into which Lyra condensed her adventures since the night of her interrupted bridal.

When it was ended the interest of Arthur was deepened, and he had many things of which he wished to ask her.

"This Mexican General is not your father, then," he said.

"No, señor, I have lived with him since I was a child, but he has never been very—"

She paused, as though frightened at her boldness.

"He's never been very kind to you," said Arthur, completing the sentence for her.

"No, señor, but I must not be allowed to say any more. I have been very willful, I suppose."

Arthur muttered something, but as it was in English his companion did not understand it, and he proceeded:

"You want to go about south-east, do you? Well, that is the direction, just at right angles to the one you were pursuing. You say there is a trail, and a wide one. That must be this way, as I should have crossed it had it lain to the left. So now if you will get upon my horse we will search for it."

He assisted Lyra up, and when he had instructed her to hold fast to him, urged his horse away through the forest. In a few minutes they came upon the trail sought, showing that the maiden had not wandered very far from her true course.

They followed it about a mile, when they came upon scenes which the maiden at once recognized, and soon after reached the Apache encampment. But here Lyra found herself at fault, and after a careful scrutiny, confessed herself unable to find the way to the place appointed for meeting the General. Arthur, however, though he had never seen the place before, knew the "signs" of an Indian trail very well, and in a short time had fixed upon the route, and they hastened upon their way.

"How fortunate you found me," the maiden said, after they were once more under way. "But for you I should have been entirely lost, and my poor father might have searched for me in vain."

Arthur did not like to hear any thing about General Escuden. He rather hoped the military Mexican might not come, or that something would transpire which should give him the monopoly of Lyra's society to Mexico. Still he was careful not to exhibit any of this to the maiden, but he assured her that the pleasure of meeting was mutual.

At length the ledge, a vast, irregular pile of rocks, appeared upon the right, and after reconnoitering it from the path as it wound by, Arthur made up his mind that he could defend it single-handed and with his wounded arm, against any reasonable number of Apaches, for a considerable time.

As it was of little moment to conceal the trail, no efforts were made in that direction. Securing the animal in the vicinity of the rocky fastness, where he could crop the tufts of grass which sprung around, Arthur and his companion clambered up the most accessible face of the ledge, and in a short time found themselves well seated upon the summit.

"There, let the red-skins come," remarked Arthur, after having carefully examined into the condition of his weapons. "Here I have one or two at long range, twelve at closer quarters, and then my knife and clubbed rifle. If I do not miss, and I keep my head out of their way, I shall prove a match for fifteen or more of them easily."

The perfect beauty of Lyra had converted the natural reckless bravery of the man into the most disciplined valor.

"I must be cool and careful, for *her* sake," he mused, replacing his weapons, while he kept a careful look-out upon all

“ I have an object for the first time in my life, and an object worth the having, too.”

Some little time passed, during which Arthur had been learning something more in relation to his fair charge, and conveying to her such sketches of his own life as he saw fit. The two had also been refreshing themselves with portions of the dried meat which Arthur had almost providentially provided.

Lyra was just beginning to express her fears that the General would not come, when Arthur checked her by a sign, adding in a low whisper:

“ Yonder he comes, and behind him three Indians, all on good terms. What does that mean ?”

Lyra could not reply, immediately. She was too much excited and alarmed. She trembled violently, but upon glancing at her companion, and seeing that he was perfectly calm, her own excitement passed away in some degree. Arthur saw the glance, even while watching the Indians, and remarked:

“ Never fear, Lyra. If any thing is wrong you shall not be harmed. I am going to take care of you, now, and I am able to do it.”

“ I can not imagine,” the maiden returned, “ why it is that my father comes in that manner. It may be that the mules for his ransom have arrived, and the Apaches are to conduct him to a place of safety. But then, what will become of me ? I am not for ransom !”

“ It might be,” Arthur growled, “ but it isn't any thing of the kind. I can tell you that from the looks of the red-skins. Something is wrong, for you can see that it is all understood about your being here.”

“ Perhaps not,” urged Lyra, as that view of the case necessarily involved the honor of her foster-parent.

“ Well, here they come, so we shall know presently, at any rate.”

CHAPTER XIII.

A NICE LITTLE GAME.

To understand the part taken by General Escuden, and the cause of the presence of the Indians, from whom he was to have escaped, in order that he might meet Lyra, and accompany her to Bernardino, it is necessary that we return again to the camp of the Apaches.

General Jose Escuden was not a strictly honorable man, as the reader has no doubt learned ere this. While quite anxious to secure his own freedom, he was by no means concerned in regard to that of Lyra. At first he had opposed her design of leaving the place, fearing, justly enough, that she would fail to reach any place of safety, and by making the attempt invoke the suspicion, if not the fury of the savages upon himself, likewise.

Afterthought had presented another consideration, and as he had now no idea that Don Manuel would pay any attention to his request for ransom, it was possible that in the attempted escape of Lyra he might find capital for his own purposes.

Acting upon this idea he had finally assented to her plans, adding to them a portion of his own plot. Then, without a pang of remorse for the deception he had been practicing upon the unsuspecting maiden, he saw her go forth upon her hopeless enterprise. Seeking the rude lodge, the work of his own hands, which he occupied, Escuden waited in patience for the alarm to be given. But one after another in the camp sunk to sleep, and the absence of Lyra was not discovered. Finally the false-hearted Mexican sought his couch, and slept till near morning.

When he awoke the Indians were just beginning to bestir themselves, and after noticing the usual calm of the camp, the uniformed scoundrel hastened to Giah-kan-yen's tent, and aroused that worthy from his sleep. He was regarded with an ugly scowl, and had his errand been less villainous he

would have shrunk from the encounter. As it was he bent very near the prostrate chief, and asked :

"Do you know the señorita has gone?"

"No," was the surly reply.

"She has gone," the General pursued, "and has been gone during the night."

"What fools my people are," exclaimed the chief. "Have they gone in pursuit of her?"

"They do not even know she has gone. I have but now learned the fact myself, and come to tell you at once."

The harsh expression upon the face of the chief softened.

"You do well to come to me," he said. "My braves shall find the runaway."

"They can not find her," added General Escuden. "She is very careful and shrewd, and it will make them much trouble. I will save them the perplexity, and the chance of losing her entirely, if you will set me at liberty, and send you a ransom beside."

"My braves can find her," returned Giah-kan-yen, a little proudly. "They will take her trail, and follow it like dogs!"

Escuden began to feel uneasy. His plan seemed likely to amount to nothing after all. The braves were sent out with the earliest dawn, and instructed to find her trail. The Mexican, regretting now that he had given the information, waited for the return of the braves with their tidings. After an hour had passed they began slowly to come back, declaring that no trail was to be found, leading from the camp.

The General was summoned again to the lodge of Giah-kan-yen, and between trembling and hope he obeyed.

The result of the search was communicated to him.

"Can you lead these braves to the white maiden?" he was asked.

"I can."

"Then lead them there, or you shall be burnt alive!"

The wretch faltered and gasped something about his liberty, but the only reply was a repetition of the command.

Three braves were detailed to accompany him, and they were especially instructed in his hearing to kill him upon the first sign of treachery, if they could not retain and bring him

back for torture. In any case he was to return with them, and if the maiden came he would still be held for ransom. If not, the stake should be his portion.

Thus it was that General Escuden came to meet his foster child at the appointed rendezvous, with three Indians accompanying him. He had been mounted upon a poor, lame pony, so that he had not a possible chance of escape from his well-mounted and armed companions.

He was not a little surprised, on beholding the trysting-ledge, to find Lyra in company with a white man. But he assured the savages who accompanied him that it was all right, and they rode near the base of the rocks, General Escuden calling to his daughter as they halted :

"Lyra, are you there?"

"Yes, General, I am here," she returned, "but what is the meaning of your coming in this manner?"

"Come down, Lyra, and I will explain it to you as we go back. It isn't what I wished, but there is no help for it; so come, do not waste time."

"Leave it all to me for a moment, dear Lyra," said Arthur, in a low tone.

Then turning to the General, he pursued :

"The señorita is under my protection, señor, and will not place herself in the power of the Apaches again unless she knows why, and to what extent. So, if you have any good reasons to give, just speak up."

The Mexican consulted his followers a moment, and then said :

"I do not know you, who assume such protection over my daughter, but I talk to her, and not to you. When her escape was discovered I was informed by the Apaches that I must see her brought back to the chief who is to be a husband to her, or be burned at the stake. As I preferred to see her there I came with these men, who have orders to kill me if any resistance is made. She can not escape, so she had better come willingly and save my life."

The maiden rose and prepared to descend the ledge. There was a troubled expression upon her face, and she seemed reluctant to make the movement. Nor was it a wonder, when she had so lately been calculating upon a return to her own land, and the enjoyment of liberty once more.

Arthur moved with her. He felt that the most important moment of his life had arrived.

"You can both have your liberty if you will," he said. "I am more than a match for those three Indians, and you shall not go back with them unless you wish."

"Indeed, I do not wish to go back," the maiden said, "but I fear for General Escuden, and I fear him, too. Oh, I know not what to do."

"You need not be afraid, either of him, or for him. I can protect him, if he is the man he ought to be; if he is in league with the savages I will shoot him!"

The maiden hesitated, almost distracted.

"I know not what to do," she said again.

"Leave it all with me, dear Lyra; say that you will leave it all with me. I will do what is best for you."

"Do what you will; you know better than I, señor. But do not let harm come to him, for I fear him still."

"Oh, thank you for the privilege," he answered, as they appeared in view of General Escuden and the savages, around a point of the ledge.

Stopping as he came near to the Mexican, he fixed his keen eyes upon the villain's countenance for a moment, and asked:

"Why are you so anxious to deliver this poor maiden, over whose actions you have, henceforth, no control, into the hands of the Apaches?"

"Look you, young cavalier," returned the Mexican, with deadly hate depicted upon his visage, "if you keep your tongue silent, and attend to your own affairs, you may leave this place; but if you interfere any more with my business I will give those Indians permission to do what they please with you!"

"Look you!" exclaimed Arthur, with determination in every accent, "Lyra Fonseca goes with me to Mexico. If you wish to go with us, you have the opportunity; if not you will do well to turn and go back with your Indian allies!"

A shout of rage broke from the gathered Indians, and each one seized the weapons with which he had been toying for some time. Their ardor cooled, however, as the stern young American confronted them with two leveled revolvers.

which he had taken the precaution to have handy in case of urgent need.

"Stop," he shouted, while never a nerve trembled. "The first one to move a weapon dies!" Go back to your chief if you will, and tell him that he must go brideless for a time. Go, or I shall fire!"

The two weapons covered two of the Apaches, and with certain death staring them in the face, they did not care to make any hostile demonstrations. But the third not wishing to heed the advice of Ashton, knowing that there would be a settlement to make with Giah-kan-yen, raised his arm, intending to hurl his hatchet at the young man.

The arm in question was never extended, however. The direction of one pistol was changed just a trifle, and its quick report spoke the savage's doom. The half-raised arm dropped again, the Indian swayed from side to side, and fell in a mortal pile upon the ground.

Simultaneously with the report the remaining savages raised a wild yell, and sprung from their horses to attack the young man upon foot. This movement speedily brought matters to a climax.

Both the savages rushed forward armed with spears. To avoid the thrust of the nearest, Arthur shot him through the body, but the instant of time required to do so was almost more than he could spare. He could only avoid the lunge of the other by dropping his revolver, and grasping the spear with the hand of his wounded arm. As he leveled the other pistol, and attempted to raise the hammer, the savage returned the compliment by springing upon him, and grasping the pistol with both hands, relinquishing his spear to do so.

A desperate struggle ensued. Arthur was naturally much the more powerful man, but owing to the wound upon his arm he could scarcely exert himself in a close struggle as usual. Still he maintained a firm hold of the pistol, allowing the spear to drop upon the ground. This gave him the wounded hand to spare, and with it at once he began to fumble for the knife at his belt.

Finally the bright blade flashed from the scabbard, and threw back the reflection of the morning light. The savage still had both hands upon the pistol, and was tugging for it so.

effectually that Arthur felt he would not be able much longer to retain it. He was not longer to need it.

The Apache's side was fully exposed, and forgetting his wound, forgetting every thing save the pale, beautiful face looking on with fearful interest, of which he caught an occasional glance, the young man drove home the blade. The Indian's life-blood spouted out in hot jets, his nerves relaxed his hands unclenched, and the fight was over.

The American was the victor.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERY ENDS.

PANTING and bleeding from the struggle, Arthur turned toward Escuden. The latter had watched the conflict with great interest, not daring to interfere, lest his worthless life should be lost in consequence. In fact he was rather chagrined at the result, as there can be no doubt but he would have sided with the Indians had he joined in the fight. Arthur regarded him a moment before speaking.

"Well, señor, what think you of your Indian allies, now?" he at length asked.

"You defeated them handsomely, señor," was the reply "I certainly expected to see you killed in a moment."

"You'd have rather rejoiced at it, I have no doubt. But the truth is, we Americans do not fight in that way. We usually go in to win."

"So you did, señor. I beg you'll not entertain any ill-feelings toward me, as I spoke to you under the impression that the Indians would murder you, and I had no power in the matter."

"Very well, we'll not waste words. If you intend riding toward Mexico with us, be pleased to prepare."

While making hasty preparations, Arthur found time to press Lyra's hand, and whisper a word or two in her ear which called the scarlet to her cheeks. Escuden noticed it.

and scowled sullenly, but the young people gave no heed to his frowns. The truth may as well be told, that each cared more for the other than for any third person on earth. Consequently the pleasure or displeasure of General Escuden was a matter of minor importance.

Finally the three, taking the horses which the Indians had ridden, mounted and set forth. There was every probability that they would soon be pursued, but the advantage rested with them, as they had so much the start, and knew the route they were to take perfectly.

General Escuden armed himself from the weapons of the fallen braves, and hinted for one of Arthur's revolvers, but the young man refused to disarm himself for a questionable friend.

Several miles they rode at a good rate of speed, and then the country through which they were obliged to pass became rougher and required cautious movements.

They were just winding around the left face of a hill, with a deep ravine upon one side, and an almost perpendicular ascent upon the other, when, upon moving around into the little valley at the foot of the hill, they discovered, but a few rods distant, another party of horsemen, coming down in like manner from the opposite side.

The strange party were evidently composed of Apaches, not above half a dozen in number, and at their head appeared the scarlet-clad rider!

Arthur would have stopped short, uncertain whether another conflict was at hand, and both sides were busily producing weapons, so unexpected had been the meeting to both parties. Niña, however, recognized Arthur, and made a signal of friendship, repeating it to her few followers. In an instant all weapons were returned, and Niña, leading a part of her followers, turned her horse to meet the young American. The General and Lyra followed more slowly, so that the two leaders met alone, midway.

"I did not expect to meet you here," the Red Rider said, in the same quiet tones which she ever used.

"The meeting is quite as unlooked for to me," said Arthur.

"You supposed we had parted forever," continued the

“Strange woman, “but it seems not. The Americans fell upon us last night, when all were asleep, and my brave band is annihilated. Here is all that is left. But there are enough to form the nucleus of another. My work is not done yet.”

She glanced upon his companions, as they drew near, and started with a sudden interest.

“Whom have you here?” she asked.

“A young señorita, who is wholly different from you, yet looks as like you as a sister, and her Mexican General of a foster-father.”

“I must look at them.”

She rode past Arthur, gazed fixedly at Lyra, and then upon General Escuden.

Something in those two persons' appearance seemed to affect her deeply—a very unusual matter, indeed.

She rode back again, without saying a word, and down among her followers, with whom she conferred a moment. This done she returned to the Mexican.

Pausing in front of the maiden, she regarded her fixedly for some moments, and then asked, calmly, and with great earnestness:

“Lyra Nunzio, do you know me?”

She whom we have known as Lyra Fonseca shook her head slowly.

“I can not tell that I have ever seen you, but it seems so.”

“She is not Lyra Nunzio, but Lyra Fonseca, señora,” interposed Escuden, with a savage frown.

“Do you remember when you were called Nunzio?” asked the strange woman in red.

“Oh, yes; but he” (indicating the General,) “says I must forget that such was ever my name; and I had not heard it for years. But who are you?”

“Do you not know Niña—your own sister of long ago?”

Lyra listened incredulously.

“My sister was killed by the Apaches,” she said.

“I will tell you in a moment how that was,” continued Niña. “But first of all, this man needs attention.”

She nodded toward the spot, and at the signal the six Apaches dashed upon General Escuden, and bore him to the

earth. Not without a struggle, for he gave one of them an ugly gash with a knife, and would have fought desperately but for the fact that he was so speedily overcome.

Arthur was uncertain whether to go to his assistance or stand on the defensive if attacked himself; but a word from Niña reassured him.

"It is all right," she said. "I will show you in a short time how he deserves it."

The overpowered General having been thrown to the earth, was bound at the wrists and elbows, after which he was placed upon his horse, and his feet tied together by cords passing beneath the animal.

"Now if you will come with us," said Niña, to Arthur and Lyra, "you shall know the mystery of my life, and especially in regard to what I am now going to do."

"We shall be allowed to proceed on our way to Mexico?" the maiden inquired.

"Certainly, and I shall go with you," was the answer. "I am your sister, Niña Nunzio, and from this day, since I have found you and *him*, my wild life will cease. Our poor father, mother and brothers will be avenged!"

A tear sprung to the eyes of the speaker, *those* eyes, so unused to emotion. Lyra saw the trembling drops, and threw herself into the arms of the Red Rider.

"Yes, you are my sister," she said, "I see it now. But I had always supposed you were dead—supposed I was alone in all the great world."

"You are not alone, my sister, and when we reach the summit of yonder mountain, I will relate to you, to this noble young American, and to *General* Escuden—for it will sound sweet to him—how I have lived, and why I have lived so."

As they ascended the mountain in question, on nearing the summit, a rattlesnake, which was lying lazily near the margin of a rocky chasm, gave his warning signal, and slid over into the retreat. A chorus of rattles came up, from some point far below.

The Red Rider turned her horse aside, and when she had looked into the depths of the recess, made a signal for the party to turn that way. On reaching the place the Indians

dismounted, obedient to her gesture. General Escuden was also placed upon his feet near the opening, and when his ankles had been securely tied together he was commanded to look down.

He obeyed, and this was what he saw.

Some twelve feet below, the rocky bottom of the chasm was in sight, covered almost with the swarming, loathsome, horrible reptiles. Around the sides of the den they hung, or reposed in compact coils in niches in the rocks. A foul, fetid smell, intensely sickening, came up.

Escuden gazed over for a moment, and then turned away. The sight was too much for him.

"Take a good look," urged the Red Rider, stepping near him. "I give you warning in time that you shall sleep there to-night!"

A low groan burst from the lips of the doomed man, as he heard this declaration.

"You do not mean that!" he gasped.

"Yes, I do. The day of reckoning has come at last, and now do you think any thing can be too severe for you? Do you fear more than justice? Think of my poor father and mother and brothers! Of myself, and all the sin that rests upon my soul on your account! I have waited long years for this day, and now it has come. Nothing on earth can save you!"

"I have possessions, I am rich!" the miserable man urged; "all shall be yours, if you will but grant me my life."

"All in vain," returned the red-clad leader of the Apaches. "I would not take all the wealth of the world for the pleasures of this hour, and the contemplation of your last resting-place!"

"Oh, fiend—devil!"

"So I have been called, but it was you that made me so."

Seeing that Arthur, with Lyra leaning upon his arm, was gazing upon the scene as though horrified, the strange Níñ turned to them.

"You wonder at this, señor," she said. "You will not so much wonder when I tell you something of the past."

"Several years ago there lived in the State of Chihuahua

two men who were prominent, one in each of the large parties of the people. At length an officer of the State was to be elected, and these two men were candidates. General Jose Escuden was one, Alvarez Nunzio, my father and Lyra's, was the other. The election was closely contested, but Escuden was defeated by a small vote. He was terribly wroth at first, but afterward professed to become a close friend of my father.

"Finally he removed to Soñora, and the affair was almost forgotten. Not long afterward, when my father, with his entire family, consisting of his wife, three sons, and the two daughters you now see before you, was stopping in one of the small towns in the western portion of the State, the place was surprised, and all save Lyra and myself—till now I supposed Lyra dead—slain. The father, mother and sons were all thrown into one pile, and their bodies burned.

"It was supposed the Apaches did the fearful deed, and so they did. But a dark man in the background, whom they all obeyed, wore a mask, and none saw him. I, instead of being killed, was given to one of the Apaches, intended for a worse fate. While standing there in the light of the fire, this dark man was jostled by the crowd, and his mask nearly fell off. While he was replacing it, I saw his face distinctly.

"It was General Jose Escuden!

"I had almost worshiped my parents, and loved my brothers and sisters dearly. Do you wonder that I was nearly killed by the terrible act?—that my reason forsook its throne? When I recovered, years had passed, and I knew not of their flight. I found myself among the Apaches, regarded by them with the peculiar deference they pay to such as I had been. I recovered my reason, possessed of some strange fancies and desires, such as I had never felt before, and which I could by no means conquer. Among them was a desire to mingle in scenes of danger, and a thirst for the shedding of human blood. With this, very naturally, came one for revenge.

"Following up this desire I accompanied their warriors upon all their expeditions, and though I never shed blood myself, I was always in the front of the fray. Finally I began to plan other raids, and urged them to undertake those which the older chiefs thought unadvisable. This gave me

favor with some of the more reckless young braves, and I organized a band of my own, clothed myself in scarlet, that stains of blood might not too easily show. For more than a year this band has been the terror of all the country in which we have operated. My great purpose was finally to reach the man I to-day encountered. My band is broken up, and when he has met his just fate I shall go where I never was known—where the 'Red Rider' never was heard of, and try to be a woman. You have my story—what do you think of it?"

"It clears up the greatest mystery I ever encountered," the young man returned. "But you did not tell me why my life was spared, when I first fell into the hands of your gang."

"I had two reasons, señor. One was that I wished to send you to make inquiries regarding this same General; another, that you was an American, against whom I held no feelings of revenge. Had you been Apache, Pimo or Mexican, I should have delighted in your destruction."

Then turning to Escuden, she continued:

"Come, señor, are you ready?"

"Oh!" the poor wretch groaned, as he rolled in abject terror, "you would not send me to death unshriven? Where is a holy padre, that I may confess to him, and make preparations?"

"Oh, wretch!" broke from the Red Rider's lips. "Did you allow my poor father, mother, brothers to confess, and prepare the way in advance? Foul murderer, confess, while the poison is coursing through your veins! Say your own masses, while the filthy serpents fill your miserable carcass with venom!"

Lyra turned away, sick at heart, and Arthur went beside her, leading her a few paces from the dreadful scene.

Nina looked at Jose Escuden for a few moments, and then waved her hand to the Indian braves who accompanied her. They sprang forward and seized the prostrate, struggling victim.

"No," he shouted, "I never will be thrown in there! You can not do it; I will die first!"

He struggled frantically to tear his bonds asunder. But they had been too securely knotted. He struggled, and attempted to bite, but the utmost efforts were vain. The will-

log savages rolled him to the brink of the chasm, and then, with a yell of infernal delight, which rose and mingled with the despairing shriek of the victim, he was pushed over!

For a moment that fearful cry ascended, then there came a dull "thud," the hiss and rattle of innumerable startled reptiles, followed by shrieks and moans too horrible for contemplation.

With a deadly shudder Niña turned from the spot, and mounted her horse. She was followed by the savages when they had gloated sufficiently over their last work. As she was about riding away, a sudden thought seemed to seize her. Springing again upon the ground, she tore off the red garments which had made her a fearful spectacle in many a desperate scene, and hurled them over into the abyss where the base Mexican had disappeared. The removal of this outer suit left her in the dress of a respectable Mexican boy, the same who had visited the miners' camp upon a previous occasion.

"I have bidden farewell to those things, and the life they have witnessed, forever. If the past can be in any degree blotted out, I may still live to some purpose."

Then turning to the Apaches, she addressed them earnestly in their own tongue for a few moments. She seemed alternately to persuade and command, and when she ceased, the savages bowed assent to her words.

"I have given them my farewell," she said, "and they have promised never to take the war-path against white men more. I leave them here; and now, if you will allow me, I shall ride with you to Mexico."

The trio rode all day, Lyra sustaining the fatigue most admirably, and just before dark reached a small Mexican village, where they found accommodations at the *posada*, and resumed their way next morning. Bernardino was avoided, for Lyra never wished to see the place again. The journey was continued until they reached Chihuahua, and here they rested for a short time.

Arthur and Niña had each considerable gold, and it was finally decided to seek the United States, where they could enter life with the past all buried, and where none could recall it.

About a month later they landed in New Orleans, and took rooms at one of the more retired boarding-houses. Lyra set herself to the task of learning the language of her adopted country, and with Arthur and Niña for teachers she made rapid progress.

One evening, some weeks after their arrival, Arthur entered the sisters' apartment with very little ceremony, holding a paper in his hand.

"Hear this," he said; and reading from the paper, continued:

"Geo. W. Ashton, one of the most wealthy planters in Adams Co., Miss., died yesterday, from the effects of wounds received in a street brawl in Natchez. His immense estates are left by his will to his son, Arthur, who, in consequence of some misunderstanding between father and son, has not been heard from in a year. Fears are entertained that the young man can not be found, which we understand will leave the estate in litigation."

"You see we have a home now," he continued, "and I go up early to-morrow morning to attend the funeral. 'Tis true there was no love between us, and I feel that he ill-used me. Still I shall let the grave cover all the past. After the funeral is over, and I establish myself, I shall come back here, for you know I never could stay there alone."

A look which passed between him and Lyra spoke more than the words. We need to say but little more.

Arthur came into the possession of his father's plantations at once, but before taking permanent occupation, joined his hand with the lovely and loving Lyra in the strongest of earthly bonds.

Niña accompanied them, and remained in the mansion a quiet, melancholy woman. She finally married an American sea-captain, and in the duties of wife, eventually of mother (almost forgot, as she quite ignored, the wild days of her former life, when she was known as THE WOMAN FIEND.

Captain Conrad, with his party of victorious miners, upon returning to their camp next morning, found it in possession of others' bodies of swarming Apaches. They retreated to neighboring fastnesses in the mountains, fighting as they went, and the fate they encountered there is unknown. They were never heard of more.

Years afterward a party of adventurers, climbing one of the more elevated hills, looked into a chasm upon its side. They started at beholding a human skeleton, white and ghastly, lying there in the semi-darkness, but they knew not the history of General Jose Escuden, or the retribution he received at the hands of the RED RIDER.

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